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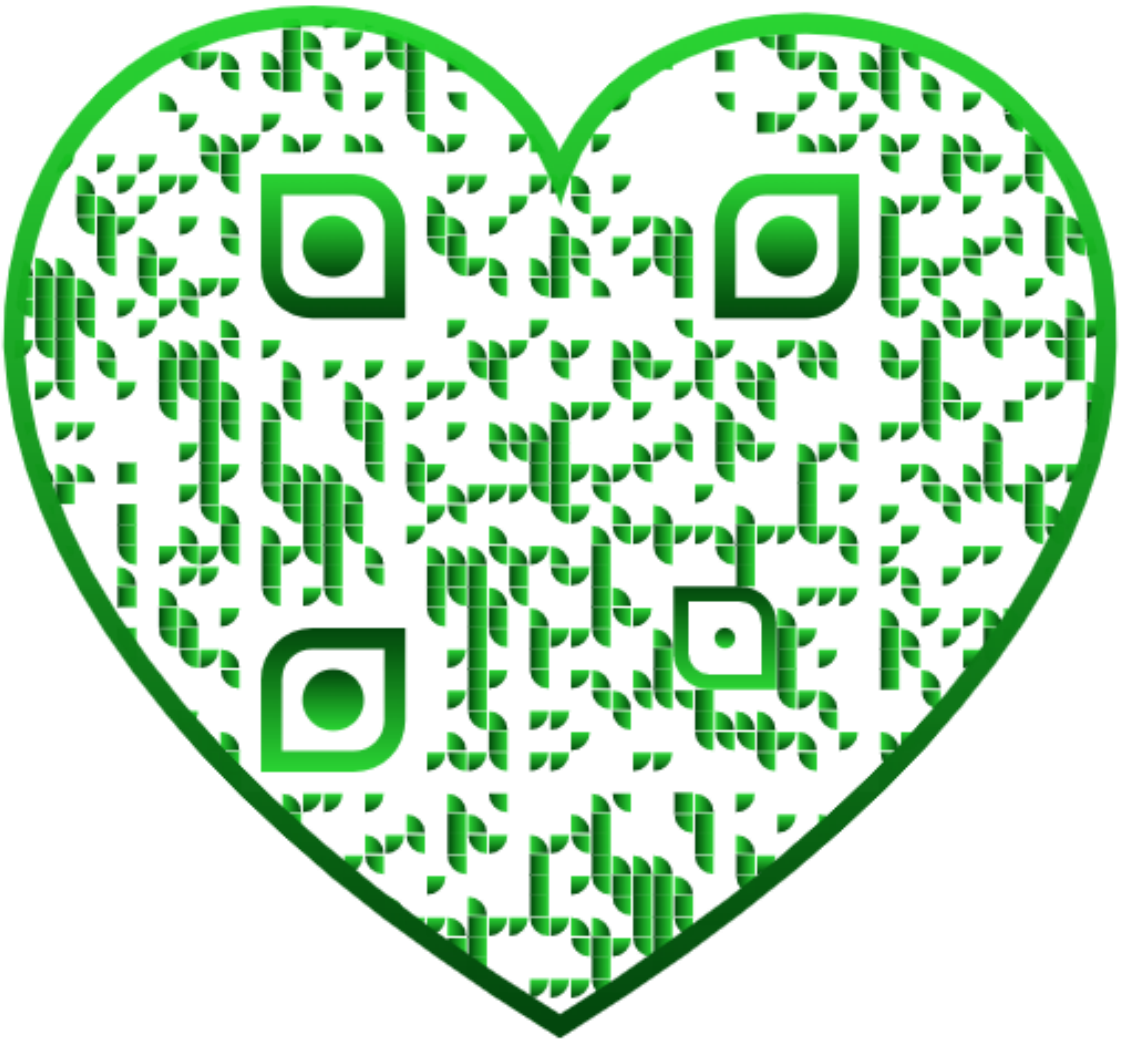

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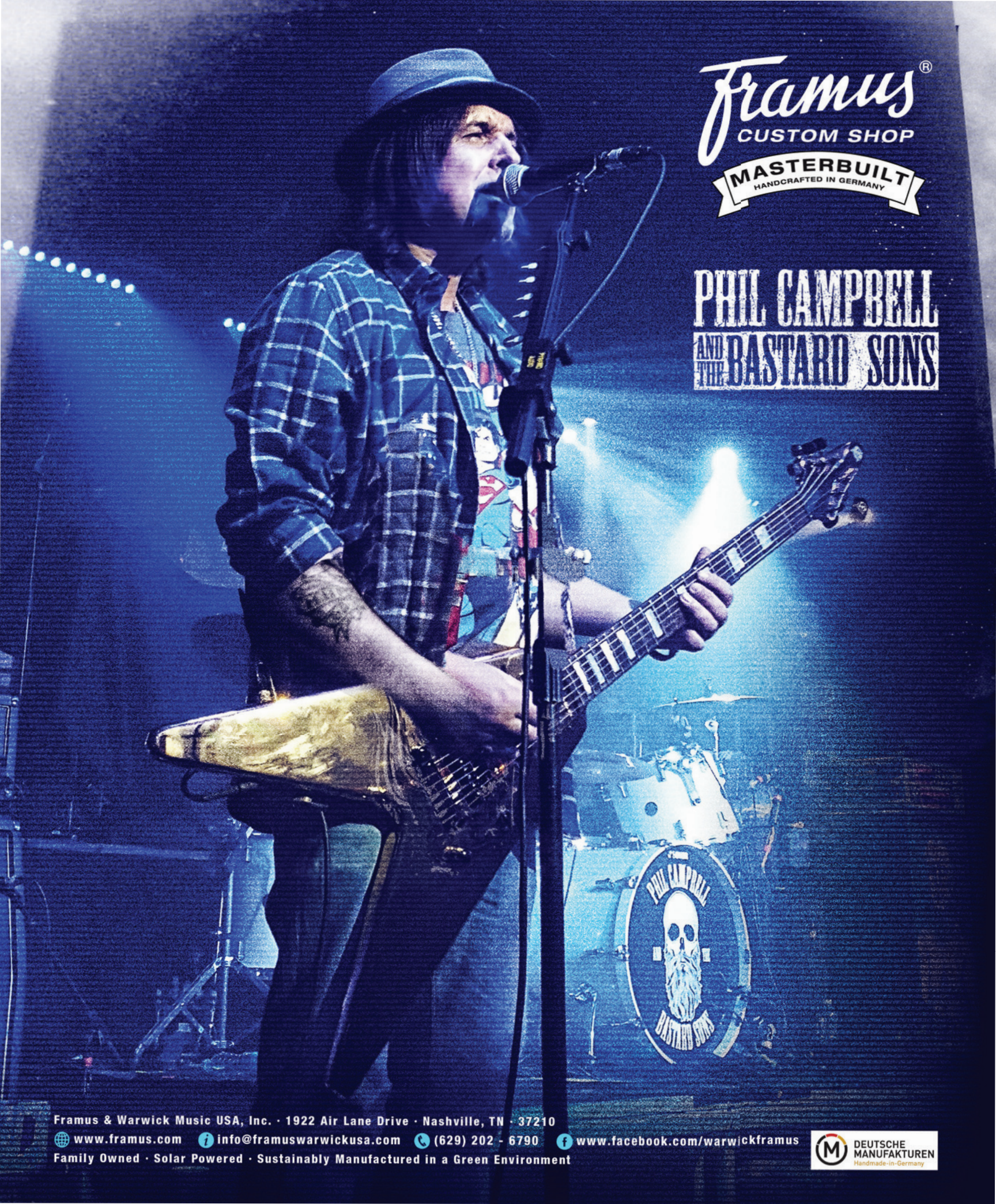

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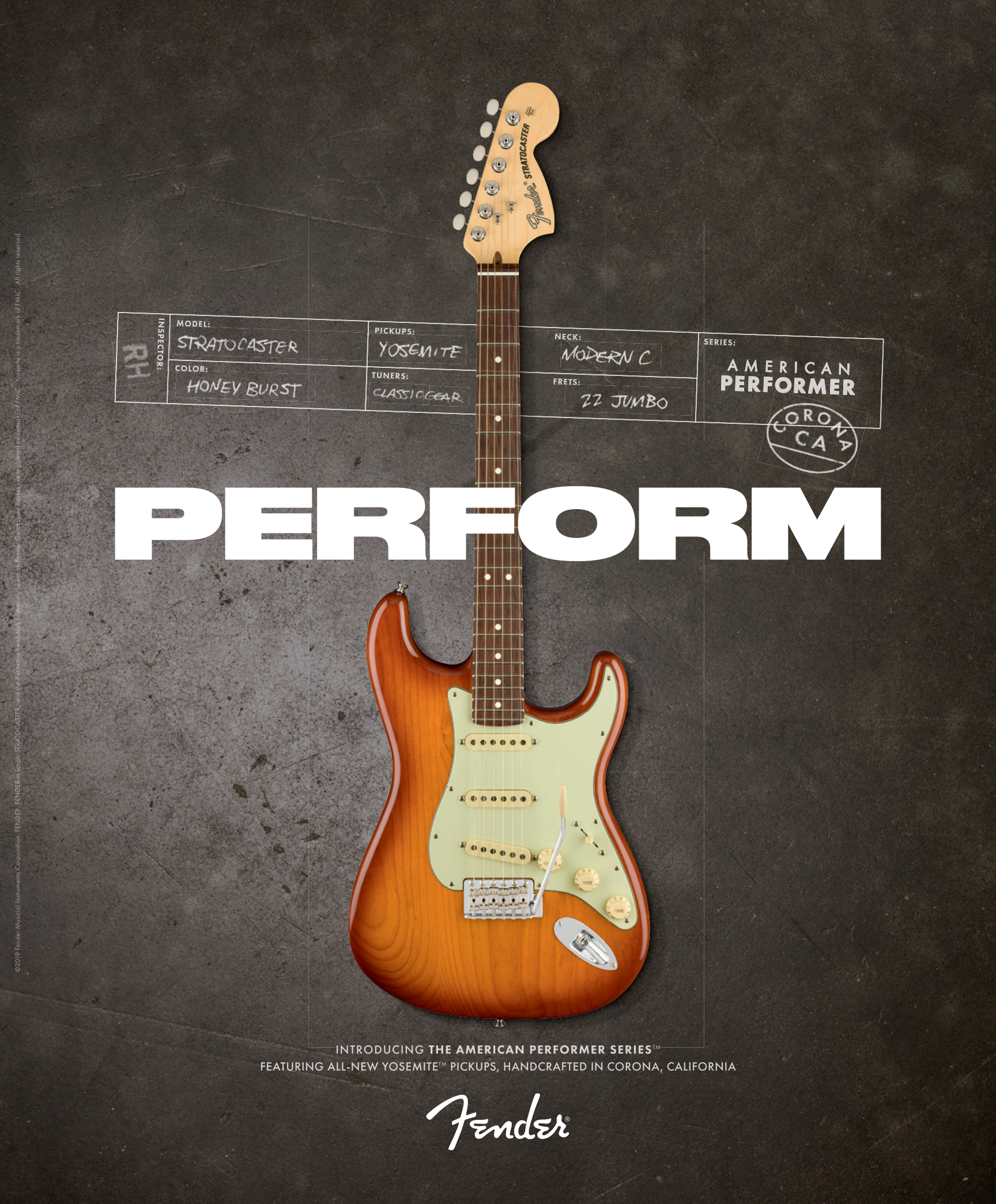

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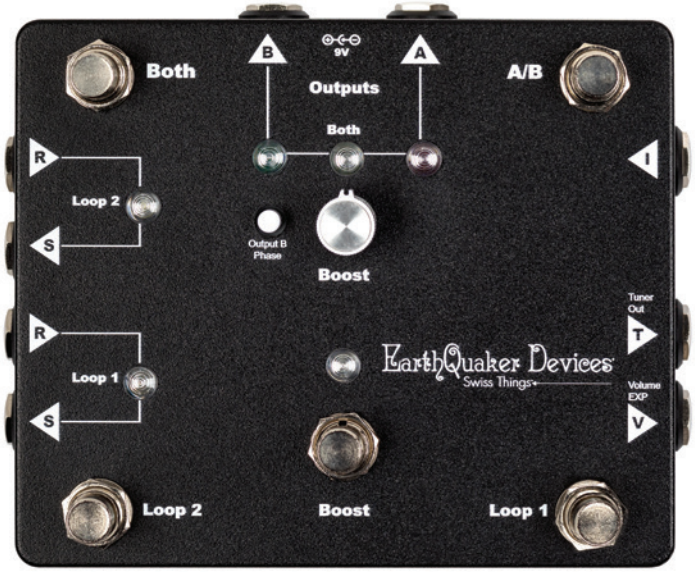

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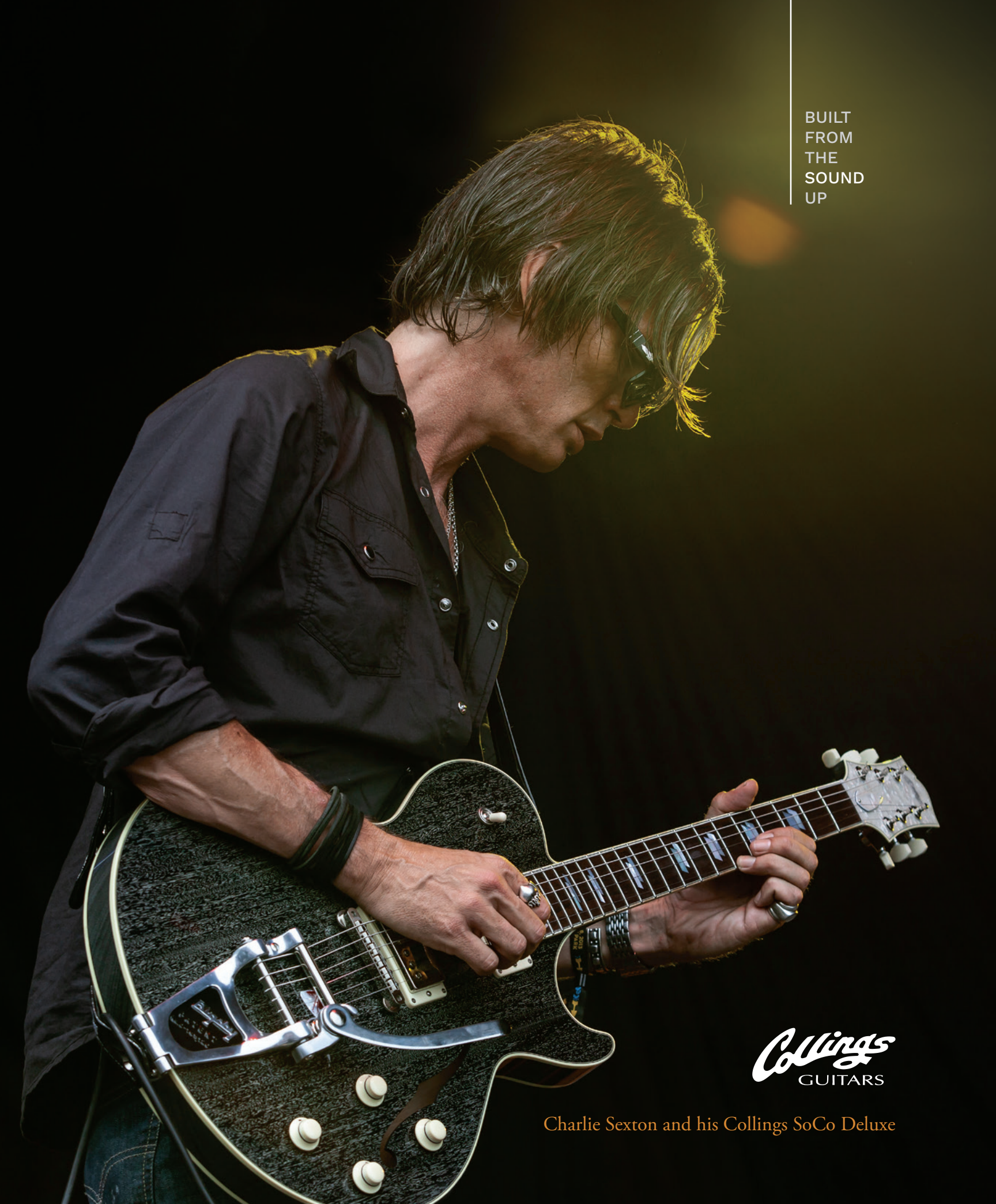

Charlie Sexton and his Collings SoCo Deluxe

The Soul of Laura

BY SHAWN HAMMOND

Division of Laura Lee circa 2017 (left to right): Jonas Gustafsson, Per Stålberg, David Fransson, and Håkan Johansson.

When guitarists herald the playing of two-guitar bands, it's often for dexterous feats of harmonized glory à la Maiden's Dave Murray and Adrian Smith, the Allman Brothers' Duane Allman and Dickey Betts, Skynyrd's Gary Rossington and Allen Collins, or, say, Animals As Leaders' Tosin Abasi and Javier Reyes. Either that or iconic duos like Keith and Brian (or Ronnie, or Mick), George and John, Angus and Malcolm, Thurston and Lee, James and Kirk, Kim and Kelley, Corin and Carrie, etc.

All of these are, of course, eminently qualified players well deserving of accolades. But there are tons of other lesser-known 6-string duos whose unique interplay is also worth close analysis. One of my personal favorites is Per Stålberg and David Fransson from Swedish post-punk outfit Division of Laura Lee.

I'd never heard of DOLL until 14 years ago, when I got a press-advance copy of the quartet's 2004 LP, *Das Not Compute*—their second for Bad Religion guitarist Brett Gurewitz's U.S.-based Epitaph imprint. Sadly, the album failed to generate enough buzz to keep the band touring stateside, but its mix of melancholy, raucous discord, and catchy melodies quickly burrowed into my heart and head. Since then, Fransson, Stålberg, bassist Jonas Gustafsson, and drummer Håkan Johansson have put out two more long-players—2008's *Violence Is Timeless* and 2013's *Tree*—and last spring they teased their upcoming LP with the release of the righteously indignant, punk-spirited anthem "Hollow Pricks."

There's nothing flashy about Division's guitar playing. It's all about attitude, atmosphere, and a deceptively simple-sounding tapestry of textures generated by Fransson and Stålberg's array of Hagströms, Jazzmasters, and Telecasters blasting through fuzzes, analog delays, and other moody-sounding effects. But it wasn't always that way: As revealed on the 12-track 2003 compendium, *97–99*, DOLL began in the late '90s as a Fugazi-esque hardcore outfit, with original guitarist Henrik Röstberg occupying the spot Fransson would later take in 2000. The latter development seems to have been key to the band's maturation into a more nuanced mélange of influences, including more melodic savvy, greater variation in instrumentation (with the inclusion of acoustic and electric piano, organ, bongos, and other percussion), and more sophisticated and adventurous tonal experimentation informed by—but by no means a copy of—noise-rock outfits like Sonic Youth and shoegaze heroes My Bloody Valentine. And yet the band's DIY hardcore roots still remain a core part of both the sonics and the lyrics.

One of the most interesting aspects of the band's 6-string dynamic is that, despite each player's guitar preferences—for the last few years Stålberg has favored WideRange-equipped Tele Customs, while Fransson has gravitated to Jazzmasters—their foundational sounds are remarkably similar. The key to their seamless sonic splicing, especially in the studio, is the deftness with which they add dimensionality and an intoxicating, lulling sense of movement to songs by making sure each player's part has a contrasting placement in the stereo field, different track and gain levels, stark EQ niches, opposite attack intensities, different fretboard positions, rhythmic-timing contrasts (e.g., pitting double-time parts against straight-time parts), or creating a greater sense of space and depth by dialing in an almost imperceptible modulation effect on just one guitar part.

Meanwhile, Fransson and Stålberg create tension through things like having both guitar parts build in unison before eventually releasing back to the former soundscape subtleties, or by having one player unselfishly drop out of the mix in order to create negative space, or by having one player fret pedal-toned parts (or simply follow the bass) while the other guitarist injects hooks, creates eerie effects, or engages in more adventurous riff explorations.

If you've been looking for something new to add to your playlist, I highly recommend you check out my Spotify playlist online to prep yourself for Division's next criminally overlooked gem ... which I'm hoping gets here before the end of the year.

Chief Content Officer
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"There's nothing flashy about Division's guitar playing. It's all about attitude, atmosphere, and a deceptively simple-sounding tapestry of textures."

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FEEDBACK LOOP

Roy Clark: An Amazing Man

I read an article a while back in which it was revealed that Roy Clark ["Roy Clark: 1933-2018," December 2018] added the comedy touches to divert some of the focus from his playing because he was nervous about his musical skills not being good enough. As if.

I've loved his music since I was a child. I remember watching *Hee Haw* before it was in syndication and playing my mom's vinyl of "Tips of My Fingers." An amazing man with an amazing legacy who will be loved for years to come.

—Raven Blackheart

Roy Clark, Homer Haynes (Homer and Jethro), and Chet were the first guitar players I met as a little kid. I had seen them all on TV in the late '50s-'60s and had some ideas about what I would ask them to play for me. The mention of "Malagueña" brought me back to when I was 8 years old. Clark was more than happy to show me how he did his syncopated parts on the lowest strings. He was very patient, probably feeling it was hopeless. Thirteen years later, we met again and I played what he showed me. He remembered it was in Hartford, Connecticut, at a traveling Opry show in Bushnell Auditorium. Others on that bill were Lester Flatt & The Nashville Grass, Homer and Jethro, Faron Young, Hank Thompson, and Miss Kitty. I miss those times.

—Kevin L.

Nashville Gem

I hope and pray that Jack gets the recognition he richly deserves ["Jack Pearson: Double Whammy," February 2019]. I have had multiple opportunities to chat with Jack at NAMM shows and the like, and not only is he a phenomenal talent, he is a real Southern gentleman. Thanks for doing the interview with him!

—B.C. Loy

Behemoth Cover

January 2019 issue cover: "Behemoth's Adam "Nergal" Darski." Wow! I never heard of that band before so I checked them out on YouTube. Wow! Alcatraz Metal Festival in Belgium, 38-minute set, out-of-tune guitars from beginning to end—they never even tried to tune. Meanwhile, Melvin "Wah Wah" Ragin, Slash, Larkin Poe, and other talented musicians are featured on the inside pages. I'm probably way too old to understand your choices. Love your mag ... anyway.

—Christian Desarmes

Based on the cover art of the January 2019 issue of *Premier Guitar*, I wouldn't have purchased it. As it is, the outer cover was so distasteful to me that I tore it off and threw it away. I really don't know what demographic *PG* is trying to attract with such cover art, but it's making me regret the second year of subscription I recently paid for. I play guitar because I enjoy making music. Consequently, I have no interest in people that are using music to further their agenda/cult/religion, etc., and have no wish to condone or support them, directly or indirectly. Please don't make me regret the trip to my mailbox, because I'm embarrassed by what's on the cover of your magazine.

—Michael Hanby

Love to Luthiers

Hey guys, LOVIN' it. Just read your article on luthiers: Adriano Sergio ["Life on the Edge of a Knife: Ergon Guitars' Adriano Sergio," February 2019]. What a great article! More luthiers perhaps? An article on Buzz Feiten and his line would be heaven. Just a thought. Best regards,

—Don Scheurwater

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I would much rather PG *write about Behemoth, Julian Lage, Emma Ruth Rundle (so happy to discover her music via your Rig Rundown!) and Tera Melos than constantly featuring the same artists who appear in "other magazines" over and over and over again. Please keep doing what you do and if people feel inclined to send you "hate mail," then know there are others of us here who LOVE what you are doing.*

—Kerr Robin

Keep those comments coming!

Please send your suggestions, gripes, comments, and good words directly to ***info@premierguitar.com***

Far left: Photo courtesy GSPI, Inc.

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

David Torn, Tim Berne, Ches Smith

Sun of Goldfinger

When David Torn and fellow guitarists Mike Baggetta and Ryan Ferreira, along with saxist Tim Berne, hold long, screaming high tones together in the early passages of "Soften the Blow," the 23-minute improvisation that closes this three-tune album, it feels like trepanning. In a good way. They open a hole in the sonic universe that expels the toxins of convention and predictability.

This is a hell of a recording, packed with high-risk spontaneous playing that thumbs its nose at label ECM Records' history of mostly mellow guitar exploration with raging, careening soundscapes colored by extreme dynamics, a difficult but dedicated romance with harmony, and the wildfire spread of ideas from player to player. If the notion of soaking in the sounds of a construction site (via percussionist Ches Smith's nearly industrial playing) while feedback clouds float by and a sax sonorously summons falcons, is appealing, *Sun of Goldfinger* nails it.
—Ted Drozdowski

Must-hear tracks: *"Eye Meddle," "Soften the Blow"*

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Photo by Alex Morgan

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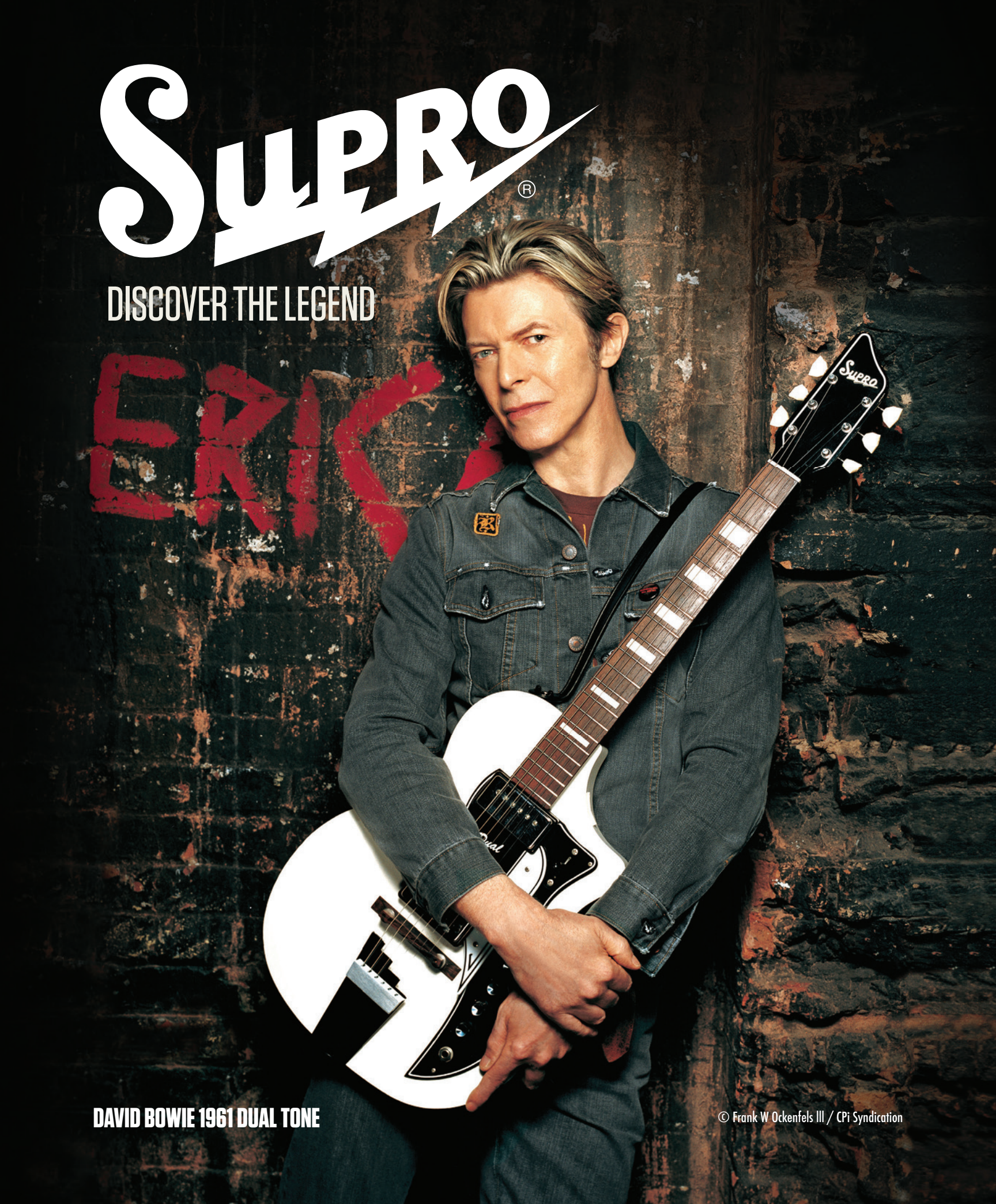
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On the Cover:
Nick Reinhart's pedalboard

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Below: Photo by Matt Akana

IN OUR MINDS, THERE'S NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN

holding a guitar and hugging a tree.

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Ariel Posen's New Solo Album

Highly respected sideman, slide man, and gear-demo star **Ariel Posen** is largely known for his work in the band **Bros. Landreth**. A quick YouTube search shows just how embedded he is in the guitar scene—he's even written guitar lessons for this magazine. But his debut solo album, *How Long*, shows his prowess as a frontman and songwriter. And he is firm on one thing: This is not a guitar album. "Obviously, I'm known as a guitar player, but my music and the music I write is not guitar music," Posen says. "It's songs and it goes back to the Beatles."

As fate would have it, Posen recorded his solo debut at the same studio where, as a young boy, he played around while his parents made klezmer records: Stereobus Recording in his hometown of Winnipeg, Manitoba. Head online to read the full interview with Posen about his journey from growing up in a tight-knit musical Canadian community, to becoming a member of Bros. Landreth, to stepping out on his own.

Read these interviews and more at premierguitar.com/mar2019

Left: Photo by Zoltan Katona

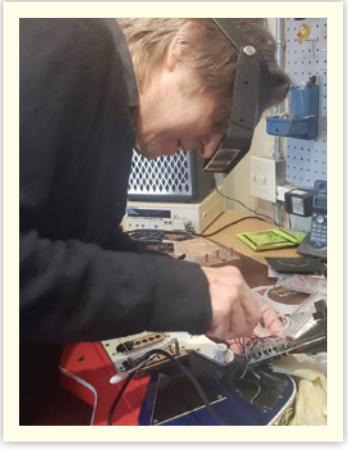
GOT GAS? TIME TO FILL UP

So you don't want or need any new gear this year ... said no *PG* reader ever! Don't miss all the insider guitar news and demo videos straight from the **NAMM 2019** showroom floor. The Anaheim winter gear gathering is the biggest, and we always do a shit-ton of interviews with your favorite luthiers and sonic inventors. If you missed our real-time coverage on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, it's definitely worth a look back down the rabbit hole, including our comprehensive galleries from each of the four days of the show, with editors' picks to boot.

You can find NAMM coverage at premierguitar.com/namm2019

INSTAGRAM LAND

A most poignant portrait of stolen spotlight.
—@gretavanfleet



Been feeling a bit under the weather, but never too sick to dink.
—@officialericjohnson

Drilling the dad scales.
—@coulsonsam87

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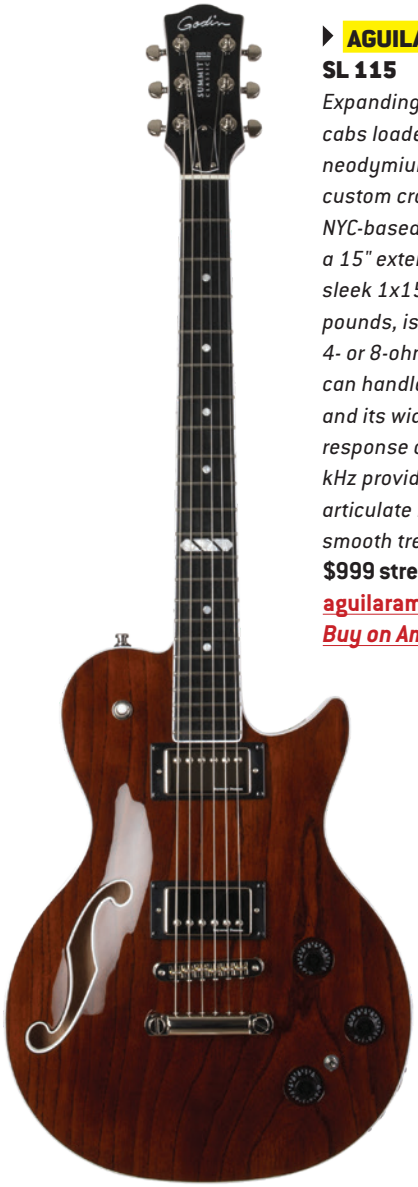

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ibanez.com

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Need a pile of modulation effects? This 11-in-one stomp features quite a few flavors—in addition to knobs for speed, depth, tone, and control (which changes function, depending on the setting). The choices include three chorus effects, three double chorus, flanger, and vibrato. The pedal also comes stocked with delay/flanger and flanger/chorus options.

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mpamp.com

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Most microphones used by guitarists are designed to be hooked up to a mixing console, and often have low impedance. This high-impedance (just like a guitar) handmade mic is constructed with an extremely high rejection of signals, so it can be placed in front of a raging amp without producing any feedback. And if that isn't enough, it has a built-in wah to filter your voice or accentuate a harmonica.

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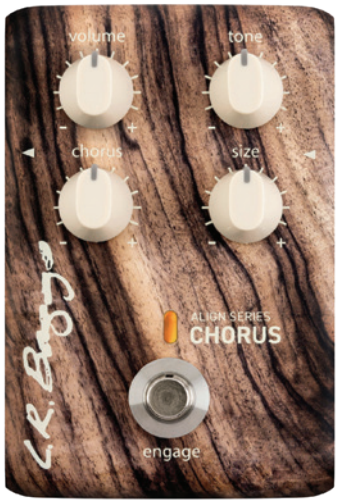

L.R. BAGGS

Align Series Chorus

Similar to a choir bolstering the foundation of a melody, the Align Chorus complements an acoustic guitar, rather than showcasing the effect itself. The pedal has simple and intuitive controls (volume, tone, chorus, size) that help you easily dial in a pleasing wobble. The star is the size knob, which blends two chorus voicings that interact with one another.

$179 street

lrbaggs.com

BLUE

Ember

Utilizing a proprietary condenser capsule, this budget-friendly mic is designed specifically for video production and livestreaming. It also features a cardioid polar pattern, compact design, and requires +48V phantom power.

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bluedesigns.com

CAPARISON

Orbit 7-CZQ

Designed in conjunction with famed Japanese guitarist Cazqui, this model was based on the classic Caparison Orbit "V," with a through-neck construction and a carved top. For maximum stability, the 5-piece neck houses a pair of titanium bars.

$4,299 street

caparisonguitars.com

LOLLAR

'70s Jazz Bass Pickup

Vintage vibes are in effect with the famed pickup builder's latest set. Built after spending time with an original 1975 Fender J bass, these pickups use flat-pole Alnico 5 magnets with coils wound to match the tonality and balance of that classic axe.

$95 street

lollarguitars.com

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Building on his previous two signature models, the latest iteration of the famed picker's namesake 6-strings is a single-cut with a set neck, Boneite nut, Bigsby tailpiece, and ebony fretboard. Vito's trademark deco triangles are also emblazoned on the humbuckers.

$1,599 street

reverendguitars.com

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OPTION KNOB

Danger Zone

Goose and Maverick would be all over this phaser/trem combo, decked out in pure '80s nostalgia. The company's first pedal comes standard with a pair of WingMan foot-control knobs for adjusting on the fly, and a few hidden features when you engage the Secret Weapon Mach II switch.

$249 street

optionknob.com

ONE CONTROL

Blue 360

Aimed at bass players, this amp-in-a-box is designed to recreate the legendary tones of the Acoustic 360 preamp. In addition to 3-band EQ and volume control, it features a -18 dB switch that works well as a preset master volume.

$169 street

one-control.com

SUPRO

1313 Analog Delay

Looking for an all-analog, bucket-brigade echo? It might be worth testing Supro's first time machine. It runs on a MN3005 chip, and features knobs for level, time, filter, and repeats. There's a 3-way switch for expression control (level, time, or repeats), the delay range is from 20 ms to 600 ms, and it was co-designed by Howard Davis—the mastermind behind EHX's Deluxe Memory Man.

$249 street

suprousa.com

PRS

McCarty 594 Hollowbody II

Based on the Hollowbody II platform, this new model mixes elements of the McCarty series by employing a 24.594" scale length, a 2-piece bridge, and tweaked Phase III tuners. The pickups are 58/15 LT (low turn) models that have a low-output, vintage-style feel.

$4,350 street

prsguitars.com

MARTIN

D-28 Modern Deluxe

As a part of the new Modern Deluxe series, this D-28 offers an updated version of one of the company's most revered models. Alongside a brand-new neck shape, each guitar in the series features a 2-way titanium truss rod and Liquidmetal red dot bridge pins.

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martinguitar.com

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chaseblissaudio.com

Reader Guitar of the Month

Name: Steve Kellett
Hometown: Petaling Jaya, Malaysia
Guitar: Farker Ply

Having been recently "excused work" due to a contract cancellation, I decided to do something constructive with my time. So I bought a Chinese guitar kit inspired by the iconic Parker Fly and set about assembling it.

The body needed some color, so I experimented with blue food dye diluted in water. I rapidly learned two things. First, that "one size fits nobody" disposable latex gloves are about as reliable as condoms bought from a pub toilet vending machine. Secondly, that the end grain soaks up water-based stain like a sponge.

After three coats of the stain, I applied teak oil on the body. Three coats later, the stain still wasn't sealed in, but an unintended consequence was that the wood grain popped out and the stain took on a turquoise tint. The maple neck sits a little high in the pocket, meaning that the bridge saddles needed to be very nearly at the top of their adjustment screws to get any sort of action on the neck. I eventually got enough relief on the neck, and after a lot of fret levelling, got it playable with a 1 mm action at the 12th fret on the 1st string and 1.5 mm on the 6th string. I also had to lower the slots on the pre-cut nut to stop the strings from pulling sharp in the first few frets.

The only things I added were a capacitor and a piezo pickup. The kit came supplied with three pots and two 3-way switches intended for a pair of 2-conductor humbucker pickups, which makes no sense. Taking inspiration from the Parker P-44 that this kit obviously rips off, I decided to wire it with one 3-way switch controlling the two magnetic pickups. I also connected the piezo system to the second 3-way switch, which allowed me to use either the magnetic pickups alone, the solo piezo pickup by itself, or combine them.

I play my "Farker Ply" in a cover band called Blues & Soul Train that currently has a weekend gig at a club in central Kuala Lumpur. I'm the guy who sneaks the Gary Moore and Van Halen covers into the setlist.

Send your guitar story to
submissions@premierguitar.com

OPENING NOTES

Devon Allman

December 8, 2018
The Fillmore
San Francisco, CA
Photo by Backstage Flash

The Allman Family Revival frontman leads an all-star Fillmore jam with his heavily modified '61 Strat, which sports a late-'50s neck, gold anodized pickguard, and a 5-way switch for the custom Amalfitano pickups. "I love the feel of a Strat, and that throaty vocal tone is so great for rhythm and lead," said Allman, who typically favors a Les Paul.

OPENING NOTES

Ernie "Ernie C" Cunnigan

December 31, 2018
The Forum
Los Angeles, CA
Photo by Matt Akana

At the same venue he saw his first concert in the 1970s, Body Count's Ernie C rips into a Schecter Jeff Loomis model for the band's New Year's Eve set. His go-to is one of a few he's modded exactly the same: neck pickup and *all* controls removed, a flat-black paint job, and an on/off switch for the EMG 81 installed in the bridge. "I'm never gonna use another volume knob in my life," C says.

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Not much compares to the experience of striking an open E chord when you have some tube-driven sonic heft behind you. The heart of the Master Lead 50 is the dual-Mullard-EL34 power amp section that is designed to saturate when pushed. Brace yourself for a paradigm shifting amplifier experience. The Sound City Master Lead 50 dares modern players to go back to rock's brawny, tube-melting roots, and experience the freedom of unbridled musical expression.

The Master Lead 50 also excels as a power house foundation for your pedals and effects. Whether straight-in or with your pedal board, the SC50 will inspire your creativity and elevate your performance. The legendary amp for legends in the making.

EDITORS' Guitar Player PICK

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REGGIE YOUNG

| 1936-2019 |

BY MICHAEL ROSS

The world lost one of the greatest session guitarists who ever lived, on Thursday, January 17: Reggie Young. Although he didn't record an album of his own until age 80, by that time Young had been helping other artists, from Elvis Presley to Bing Crosby to Willie Nelson to Martina McBride, make records for more than half a century. Young died at his home outside of Nashville. He had suffered through surgeries in recent years and never fully recovered, and is survived by his wife, Jenny, who he met while they were both in Waylon Jennings' touring band in 1999. Young was 82.

Reggie Young, Jr. was born in 1936 in Osceola, Arkansas. When he was 13, his family moved to Memphis. His first guitar was a National flattop that he fitted with a DeArmond pickup and ran through a Rickenbacker amp. He was soon learning the licks of Chet Atkins and fellow Memphis resident B.B King.

As a teenager, his band Eddie Bond & the Stompers had a regional hit and found themselves touring with Elvis, where Young met Presley bassist Bill Black. Black started him on his studio career and employed him in his own Bill Black's Combo, which led to Young playing on his first national hit, the Combo's "Smokie Part 2." Young's unique sound on that record was created by tuning his Gibson ES-335 down two whole-steps and tapping on the strings with a pencil.

Drafted right after the song hit the charts, the guitarist spent most of his military tour in Ethiopia, where he played a newly acquired Fender Duo-Sonic at the enlisted men's club. Back in Memphis, Young began working at Hi Records' Royal Studios, and again with Bill Black's Combo. Though mostly a studio band, they made an exception to tour with the Beatles in 1964. After the first concert, George Harrison began questioning Young about gear. He told the Beatle he played through a Standel amp, and schooled Harrison on the use of an unwound third string for easier bending. The Combo also toured Europe, where Young met young Eric Clapton.

Back at Royal Studios, Young was dissatisfied with the meager pay, so when former Stax producer Chips Moman asked him to start doing sessions at his new American Sound Studio, the guitarist was happy to jump ship. There, they put together the legendary band of Tommy Cogbill, Gene

Chrisman, and Bobby Emmons. The Memphis Boys, as they would come to be known, went on to record a perhaps-unparalleled string of hit records, including Elvis Presley's "Suspicious Minds" and "In the Ghetto" (recorded with Young's 1967 Garcia nylon acoustic), Neil Diamond's "Sweet Caroline," Merrilee Rush's "Angel of the Morning," and Dusty Springfield's classic *Dusty in Memphis*—to name but a few. Young's iconic riff for the intro to Springfield's "Son of a Preacher Man" was only one of many signature licks he would provide over the years to lift already great songs into the stratosphere. The Memphis Boys created the sound of the Box Tops' hits "The Letter" and "Cry Like a Baby"—the latter showcasing Young's first work with the electric sitar. It was at American Studios that Young met Clarence Nelson and Bobby Womack, two guitarists who would greatly influence his style.

> ***"There's no other guitar player on earth that has his taste, soul, and expertise at making a song shine just by adding his parts to it." —Brent Mason***

After five years, Chips Moman moved his operation to Atlanta, Georgia. Unhappy there, Young headed back to Memphis, fatefully stopping off in Nashville. He ran into pianist David Briggs and bassist Norbert Putnam, musicians he had met doing sessions in Muscle Shoals in 1963, and who had a Nashville studio called Quadrafonic Sound. Young began working with them. He commuted back and forth from Memphis to Nashville for a while, but by the early '70s was firmly settled in Music City. Around 1973, Putnam and Briggs used him on a session for Dobie Gray, where Young laid down the legendary guitar intro to "Drift Away." When the song became a hit, country acts started requesting the guitarist who played the unforgettable parts on that record. Another classic identifying lick was his harmonized whole-tone intro to Billy Swann's 1974 hit "I Can Help."

It wasn't long before the transplant was earning double-scale and working three sessions a day.

Young was soon called to play for country legends like Waylon Jennings, Merle Haggard, George Jones, and Willie Nelson. His soloing on Haggard's "I Think I'll Just Stay Here and Drink," played on his 1957 Stratocaster, is a textbook for would-be country guitarists. He cut records with artists who would currently be labeled Americana, like J.J. Cale and Tony Joe White, and in the '80s added a new generation of country legends to his list: George Strait, Reba McEntire, John Anderson, Travis Tritt, Clint Black, and Hank Williams, Jr.

That decade saw studio work falling off, even for a master of Young's stature, so the guitarist returned to the road, backing Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, and Kris Kristofferson, who were known collectively as the Highwaymen, and later he toured as a member of Waylon Jennings' Waymore Blues Band. His studio schedule slowed further, but the guitarist still turned in stellar work into the '90s, for Martina McBride, Boz Scaggs, and others.

The upside to this downslide was that, in 2017, the octogenarian Young finally had the time and inclination to make his first solo album, *Forever Young*. The recording began in Muscle Shoals, with Chad Cromwell on drums, David Hood on bass, and Clayton Ivey on keyboards, and Young added horns at his home studio in Leiper's Fork, Tennessee. Unhappy with the guitar sound from Muscle Shoals, Young rerecorded the parts at home on his black '69 Fender Telecaster through a '65 Fender Deluxe Reverb amp. *Forever Young*'s tunes are rife with the tone, taste, and time that made him the first-call guitarist for many producers, songwriters, and artists through the decades. And fortunately, Young lived long enough to enjoy the plaudits of peers and acolytes, who welcomed this recorded distillation of his brilliance.

As long as the talent of session guitarists is required, generation after generation will study the work of Reggie Young as a how-to template. But on a larger scale, everyone—musicians and non-musicians alike—who hears "Son of a Preacher Man," "In the Ghetto," "Hooked on a Feeling," and "Drift Away" will be instantly drawn into those songs through the art of Young's intros, and he will live on in his brilliant music.

YOUTUBE IT

Re-experience the classic Memphis guitar sound that Reggie Young played a major role in developing at the American Sound and Royal studios in the Bluff City, in this tribute to the era, "Memphis Grease," from his lone solo album, 2017's *Forever Young*.
YouTube search term: Memphis Grease

MANCHESTER ORCHESTRA

Robert McDowell, Andy Hull & Andy Prince

GUITARS & BASSES

Top left: Guitarist Robert McDowell's main squeeze for the last few years has been the "Sheriff"—a Fender '72 Telecaster Deluxe reissue. It originally belonged to bandmate Andy Hull, but McDowell really gravitated towards it at the same time Hull was falling out of love with it. Both Robert and Andy use Ernie Ball Power Slinky .011–.048 strings

Top right: At first glance, Andy Hull's longtime No. 1 (a Fender Telecaster) has *nothing* going on in it, but it does have a single Seymour Duncan Little '59 Tele bridge pickup. All the other wiring, switches, and pots have been removed so the signal is as pure as possible.

Bottom: Bassist Andy Prince's longtime go-to is this custom-built P that centers around a lighter body from the '80s and '50s-style P neck. The vibrant red color and anodized-gold pickguard are a nod to his grandfather's favorite bass.

Click here to watch this Rig Rundown now.

AMPS

Top: McDowell appears to have a two-headed monster lurking behind him onstage, but the only amp that's hot (normally) is the Vox AC30C2 that also powers the Janus 2x12 cab it's sitting on.

Middle: Overdrive pedals and hybrid amps were Prince's tonal formula for many years, but recently he's downsized the dirt and upgraded to some organic tube tone by way of the Fender Super Bassman 300-watt head.

EFFECTS

Bottom: Here's Hull's minimal stomp station. (Talk about road-tested gear!) With no controls on his main Tele, dynamics are harnessed by way of the Ernie Ball Volume Pedal, and the few noisemakers include a Boss BD-2 Blues Driver, EHX Holy Grail, and an Old Blood Noise Endeavors Procession. Like McDowell, everything is kept in line with the Boss TU-3 Chromatic Tuner while a Walrus Audio Aetos provides the juice.

BUY THE GEAR ›

EMMA RUTH RUNDLE

Emma Ruth Rundle & Evan Patterson

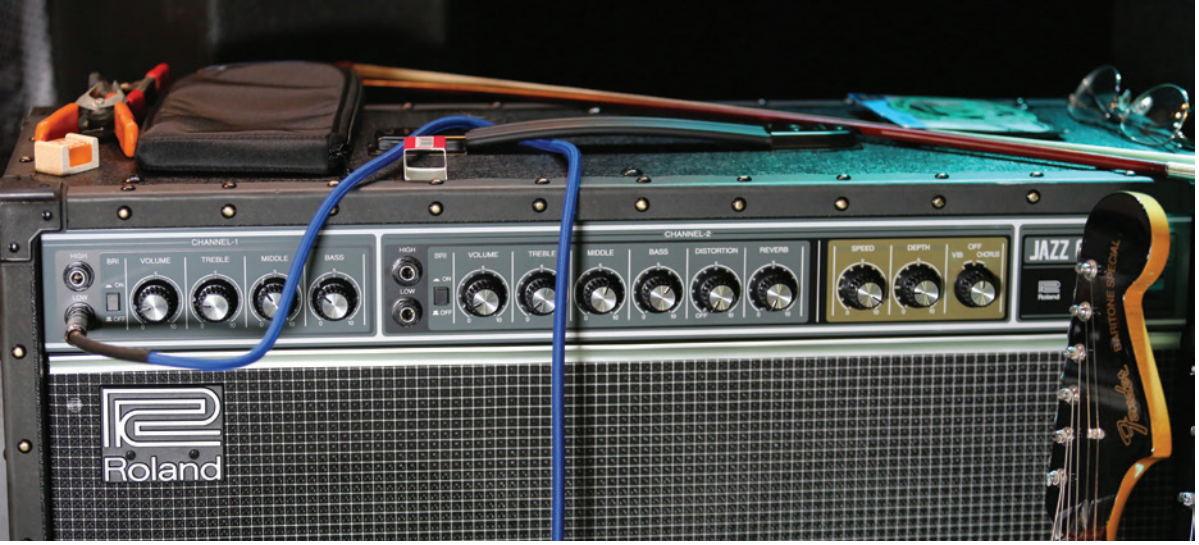
GUITARS

Top: Emma Ruth Rundle has been an ardent user of SGs for their light stature and hearty tones. She has named this Guild T-Bird "The Cloud"—the only one in her collection with a nickname—and the guitar bounces around various opening tunings that typically start in DADGAD.

Bottom left: When things need to get low and rumbly, Rundle turns to this Fender Jaguar Special Baritone HH, and the beast rides in open-G♯ tuning with D'Addario EXL158 Baritone Light .013–.062 strings.

Bottom right: Evan Patterson was a longtime user of a beat-up Fender Telecaster (neck pickup only) in his band Young Widows, but while supporting Rundle he was after the loudest electric guitar that offered the most acoustic qualities, so he's welcomed the semi-hollow tones of the Fender Coronado II reissue.

Click here to watch this Rig Rundown now.



AMPS

Top: One half of Rundle's amp pie is this Roland JC-120 Jazz Chorus that's been a fixture in her setup for years because of how she enjoys the note retention and clarity it provides her lower tunings and baritone guitars.

Middle: Just like Rundle, Patterson hits the stage with red lights on two amps—the 10th Verellen amp ever made and a Hiwatt Lead 100.

EFFECTS

Bottom: A quick glance at Rundle's board and you know she *loves* reverb. She has three reverb units (Red Panda Context, Boss RV-5, and additional 'verb patches in the Line 6 M9 Stompbox Modeler). In addition, she uses a DigiTech Whammy, EarthQuaker Devices Black Eye and Palisades, Electro-Harmonix Stereo Memory Man with Hazarai, and a Boss DD-6 Digital Delay. Things are kept in tune with the Korg Pitchblack and power is dished out by way of the Truetone 1 SPOT.

BUY THE GEAR

Hagstrom
III

ON
OFF
TOP

Hagstrom
III

1967 Hagström F-300

BY RICHIE OWENS

You gotta have that one guitar in your collection that's a little—or a lot—left of center to get that sound standard-model 6-strings won't give you. Right? You can always count on getting classic tones from your Tele, Strat, Les Paul, SG, or whatever in the solidbody category, but you also need that oddball to give your palette something different. Or at least I do. So the minute this beautiful 1967 Hagström F-300, which was sold in Europe under the Hagström III name, came into the shop, I started to jones for it.

There's a cool backstory to this model. In 1963, Ben Davis, the owner of the London-based Selmer company, which distributed Hagströms in the U.K., wanted an update on the company's Futurama model to stimulate sales. The result was the offset-bodied Futurama Coronado Automatic, which looked something like a Fender Jazzmaster. Only 200 were built, but they seemed to trigger a new-guitar wave at Hagström: Along came the Automatic, the two-pickup Hagström II, and, then, our F-300. As you might guess—or cheat by looking at the photos—the F-300 was a three-pickup model with a clear debt to the Fender Stratocaster, including a whammy bar ... typically of questionable usefulness.

The Hagström F-300 started shipping in 1965. The bulk of this model's production was from its inauguration to 1967, although records indicate that limited manufacturing and shipping continued until at least 1972. The example we're eyeballing has a tobacco sunburst finish and arrived at the shop with the original chipboard case, with a tiger-print plush lining that really made the guitar pop when we first opened the case. The gent who owned the guitar was its original owner, and he looked the part, strolling into the store with blue-black dyed hair and an early '70s Stones/Faces rooster cut, wearing straight-legged jeans and Beatle boots. So this F-300 is kind of like a dog that resembles its owner. Both have a similar rock 'n' roll swagger—although with its biting single-coil pickups, fans of Hound Dog Taylor's raw blues would also be happy hugging this Hagström.

This guitar sports the key Hagström appointments of its era, and a little more. There's the company's H-Expander truss rod, which allows for comfortably low action. The birch body has a 3-bolt neck joint, and that neck's got a comfortable rosewood fretboard with dot inlays. Although the headstock screams "Fender," the body's pointy double wings acknowledge the design of the Hagström II and, of course, the Gibson SG. And then things get happily weird. The guitar has multiple switches, which affect the pickups, along its lower belly. There is a master volume dial with the six switches. The first three are on/off switches for each pickup, which allows for more combinations than the standard Fender-style 5-way switch. Despite that, they are labeled L, M, and H, for low, middle, and high. The next three are, respectively, a tone switch that rolls off highs, a mute switch that acts like a pad, and another tone button that performs like a high-pass filter. So finding the variety of tones this guitar can produce takes some practice to extract. Or maybe not: I didn't notice much difference with these switches engaged or disengaged. Maybe more experimentation with blending different pickups and switch-button positions would yield more noticeable results? I dunno. According to the 1968 Hagström catalog, the original retail price for this guitar was $125. Today's asking price for this guitar, which is in excellent condition, is $1,099.

Oh, and about those Hagström pickups. They're known for a hot, punchy sound, with clear and snarling highs, and these live up to that reputation. A surprising bonus is that this particular vibrato arm does a decent job of staying in tune with subtle use. Inspired by artists who've played this model, including David Bowie, Andy Partridge of XTC, and even Neil Young, I'm still thinking about this one.

RICHIE OWENS *heads marketing and sales at Nashville Used and New Music. He's an award-winning producer/engineer/multi-instrumentalist and veteran instrument industry designer, historian, and consultant with multiple signature models. A fifth generation musician, Owens has worked with a variety of artists from Dolly Parton to the Georgia Satellites. He can be reached via nashvilleusedandnewmusic.com.*

Opposite page:
(Left) With three pickups, a whammy bar, a 22-fret neck, and a tobacco sunburst finish, this very clean example of a Hagström F-300, aka Hagström III, has retained its rock 'n' roll swagger for more than a half-century.

(Middle) This view of the back of this '67 F-300 displays surprisingly little scarring, as well as the 3-bolt joint holding the sturdy neck in the guitar's birch body.

(Top right) Here's a look at the external controls for this guitar's electronics. There's an overall on/off—an effective killswitch—on the upper bout, and six switches and a master volume in the guitar's belly, just above the input jack.

(Bottom right) Like the guitar's body shape and pickup configuration, this headstock signifies the influence of Fender's Stratocaster.

1982 G&L SC-2

BY WILL RAY

Click here to hear this guitar.

WILL RAY *is a founding member of the Hellecasters guitar-twang trio. He also does guitar clinics promoting his namesake G&L signature model 6-string, and produces artists and bands at his studio in Asheville, North Carolina. You can contact Will on Facebook and at willray.biz.*

I have a friend named Mac Whiteside, who lives in Austin, Texas. He has done a lot of custom guitar builds and modifications for me over the years. He's also an avid G&L collector. He mentioned that he had an '80s G&L SC-2 in his guitar arsenal. He sent me a picture, and for some reason I just fell in love with it. I'd never owned a G&L from the '80s, and I was curious how that guitar would compare with my newer G&Ls. We talked several times about a guitar swap, and when I finally found the right guitar, he said okay.

Bottom Feeder Tip #289: Sometimes a guitar trade with a friend makes sense when money is scarce. Both parties get a new instrument to satisfy their guitar-playing wanderlust, while saving their money for more important things, like, well, other guitars.

The SC-2 arrived, and I was excited about the look of it. The original white finish had aged over the years into a beautiful yellowish cream color. The maple fretboard and headstock likewise had an aged look.

Here's a little history on G&L: After Leo Fender sold Fender to CBS in 1965, he took the money and joined the team that started Music Man as a silent partner in 1971. He did that for nearly a decade and left Music Man to start G&L in 1979, with his longtime collaborator and the inventor of the Stratocaster, George Fullerton. Incidentally, the letters "G" and "L" stand for George and Leo—pretty casual for two industry titans.

So, back to the SC-2. That model debuted in the early '80s, when Leo and George wanted to create a new line of inexpensive but fully professional guitars at G&L. The SC-2 had the same Magnetic Field Design (MFD) pickups as its older and more expensive sibling, the venerable ASAT Special. It also used the same bridge, switches, and wiring as the ASAT. In fact, outside of the body shape and lack of a pickguard, this guitar is the same as an ASAT Special in nearly every way. The feel, electronics, and build are all top notch and as professional as it gets. I liked my SC-2 so much that I later added a black Hipshot bender to match the black-powder-coated hardware, so it could go into battle anytime, anywhere, on my terms.

So, how do the early-'80s MFD pickups sound compared to my newer ASATs? Very similar: a little lower in volume, but with a bit more sizzle in the top end. Check out how it sounds in my MP3 at premierguitar.com. The lighter weight of the guitar's body also gives the SC-2 a different sound than the ASAT, while retaining the bite that MFD pickups are known for.

Is it a keeper? Yeah, and Mac made me promise to let him know if I ever decided to get rid of it. He understands.

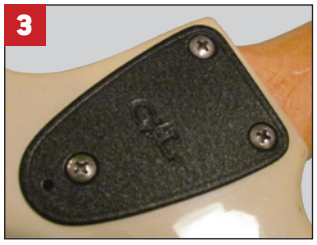


Photo 1: *Will Ray's trade guitar, an '82 G&L SC-2, was essentially stock until he installed the Hipshot B-bender on its tail. The cream patina is courtesy of natural aging.*

Besides its twin single-coil pickups with adjustable pole pieces, the SC-2's straightforward electronics are represented by its control set: volume and tone knobs, and a 3-way pickup selector.

Photo 2: *The SC-2's headstock displays the company's lineage, with a very Leo look.*

Photo 3: *A 3-bolt setup holds the neck firmly in place—another classic Fender design element, translated to the G&L brand.*

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'60s Excelsior Jamaica III

BY FRANK MEYERS

FRANK MEYERS *is the author of* The History of Japanese Electric Guitars *and runs the website DrowninginGuitars.com. He has been collecting and repairing guitars for 30 years and is primarily interested in unique, eclectic gear and shedding light on the people and history that contribute to our love of music and guitars.*

1

I had an interesting grandpop. The guy stood about 5'6" and was hardy as hell. He was a WWII army vet and had the scars and tattoos to prove it. Man, he was a tough dude. Looking back, I idolized him, but I was also sort of scared of the guy. I'd seen him get into a few scraps—even getting into a fight with my other grandfather! One thing I really enjoyed about him was his love of auctions, flea markets, and sales. He had an eclectic taste for nostalgia and indulged himself with all manner of beer memorabilia, war artifacts, tools, and musical instruments.

His family was from Austria, and he truly enjoyed drinking beer and listening to polka music (which always seemed to go together really well). As a kid, I remember going to local carnivals and festivals where polka bands drew a rambunctious and happy crowd. Those were some great memories and, even today, I enjoy seeing polka bands because I think the music is just so darn upbeat and happy. And most of the lyrics are about drinking beer! Though my grandpop couldn't play any instruments, he did have an interesting collection of accordions, drums, guitars, and these totally crazy percussion contraptions called a "boomba." You really need a boomba in your arsenal.

Why am I describing my grandpop and polka music? Well, back in the day, there were many prized Italian accordions and concertinas used by these bands. One of these makers was the Excelsior company, which was started in America in 1924 by brothers Egisto and Roberto Pancotti. Eventually, the family returned to Italy and set up a factory in the famous Castelfidardo area, which became the home of many instrument manufacturers after WWII. One of the crazy accordions owned by my grandpop was a particularly sparkly Excelsior, and I recall him really admiring it. In fact, it had a special place on the wall behind his basement bar. Anyone else had a grandfather with a barroom in his basement?

Years later I would find myself visiting flea markets and estate sales to search out old oddities, just like my grandpop. One day I came upon a truly kooky electric guitar with the brand name of Excelsior. And wouldn't you know it, the guitar and my grandpop's accordion came from the same factory. See, by the early 1960s, many accordion companies were sensing the profit potential in electric guitars, and Excelsior jumped into the boom with a full line of 6-strings. Of those, the most expensive model was the Jamaica III (**Photo 1**), which retailed for $189.50.

2

These guitars are interesting in several ways. First off, many of the components were exclusive to Excelsior electrics. The bridge is a thing of engineering beauty, and it's very effective. The pickups are excellent mini-humbuckers, but the pickup covers have this hard plastic (or ceramic) black insert (**Photo 2**). The pickups are rather hot: The neck and middle pickups read in the high 8k range, but the bridge pickup measures a mighty 11k. When your pick hits those black covers, it creates this plinky, dinky, tapping sound that translates through the amp. You definitely can't be sloppy when playing this guitar.

3

The headstock on these Excelsior solidbodies has to be one of my all-time favorite designs. It's simple (**Photo 3**), but looks really cool in an understated way. My particular example has a black painted headstock, though the guitar sports an *extra thick* natural finish that resembles melted polyester. The bodies of these guitars were apparently made of maple, as were the necks, so the guitar feels substantial. All the Excelsior fretboards have a very rounded radius, but the extra odd carving at the lower strap button sets this model apart from the company's other offerings.

So there you have it: an Italian guitar with an island name made at the same factory as a sparkle accordion hanging in the basement bar of my polka-loving grandpop. So throw one back this weekend in memory of this fine fella, and then go find a boomba. Consider it homework, due next month.

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| BY THE PREMIER GUITAR STAFF |

JULIEN BAKER

While her band, boygenius, performs as a trio (occasionally with backing musicians), Julien Baker is the only performer onstage during her solo set—a scenario that requires a lot of different sound-generating gear. To switch between her two amps—a Fender '68 Custom Twin Reverb and a Fender Blues Deluxe—she employs Morley George Lynch Tripler and ABC switchers, and to create audio loops she uses a Boss RC-3 Loop Station. The units she uses to effect her guitar signal include an Electro-Harmonix Mel9, a Strymon blueSky Reverberator, a trio of Walrus Audio pedals—a Fathom, a Bellwether, and a Descent—a ZVEX Fuzz Factory, an Emerson Custom Paramount Overdrive, and a pair of Old Blood Noise Endeavors stomps: the Excess, and the Dweller. Her guitars—typically a blue Fender Tele or a butterscotch Tele with G&L ASAT pickups, are kept in tune with a TC Electronic PolyTune2 Mini.

Top: Photo by Nolan Knight

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NICK REINHART

Tera Melos' notorious tone-bastardizer, Nick Reinhart, combines quirkily modded pawnshop axes with boutique pedals and yesteryear's cutting-edge guitar-synth technology. With regard to the latter, the tonal insanity begins at his circa-1996 Roland GR-30 floorboard.

Post GR-30, the wildness continues with a board holding EarthQuaker Devices Arrows and Aqueduct stomps, a Mantic Isaiah, a Source Audio Nemesis, a Meris Enzo, a Boss CE-2 Chorus, and a Rainger FX Bleep. There are also two Bosses: a TU-2 tuner and an LS-2 Line Selector, the latter of which switches between magnetic and synth pickups on Reinhart's main axe, a '90s Squier Super-Sonic.

Reinhart's second board (opposite page) features a paint-splattered Line 6 DL4 Delay Modeler, Red Panda Context and Tensor pedals, an Ibanez DML20 Modulation Delay III, a pair of EarthQuaker Devices devices—a Tone Job and a Rainbow Machine—an Electro-Harmonix Micro POG, Boss BF-3 Flanger and DD-3 Digital Delay stomps, and a Cameltone Nard. Along the bottom is a Keith McMillen 12 Step controller that Reinhart uses to access combined patches and vocal effects. To the right of the board is a Jim Dunlop Volume (X) Mini for altering the Tensor's pitch, and atop that is a pressure-sensitive Igor pad for warping the Rainger FX Bleep's response.

Top: Photo by Piero F Giunti

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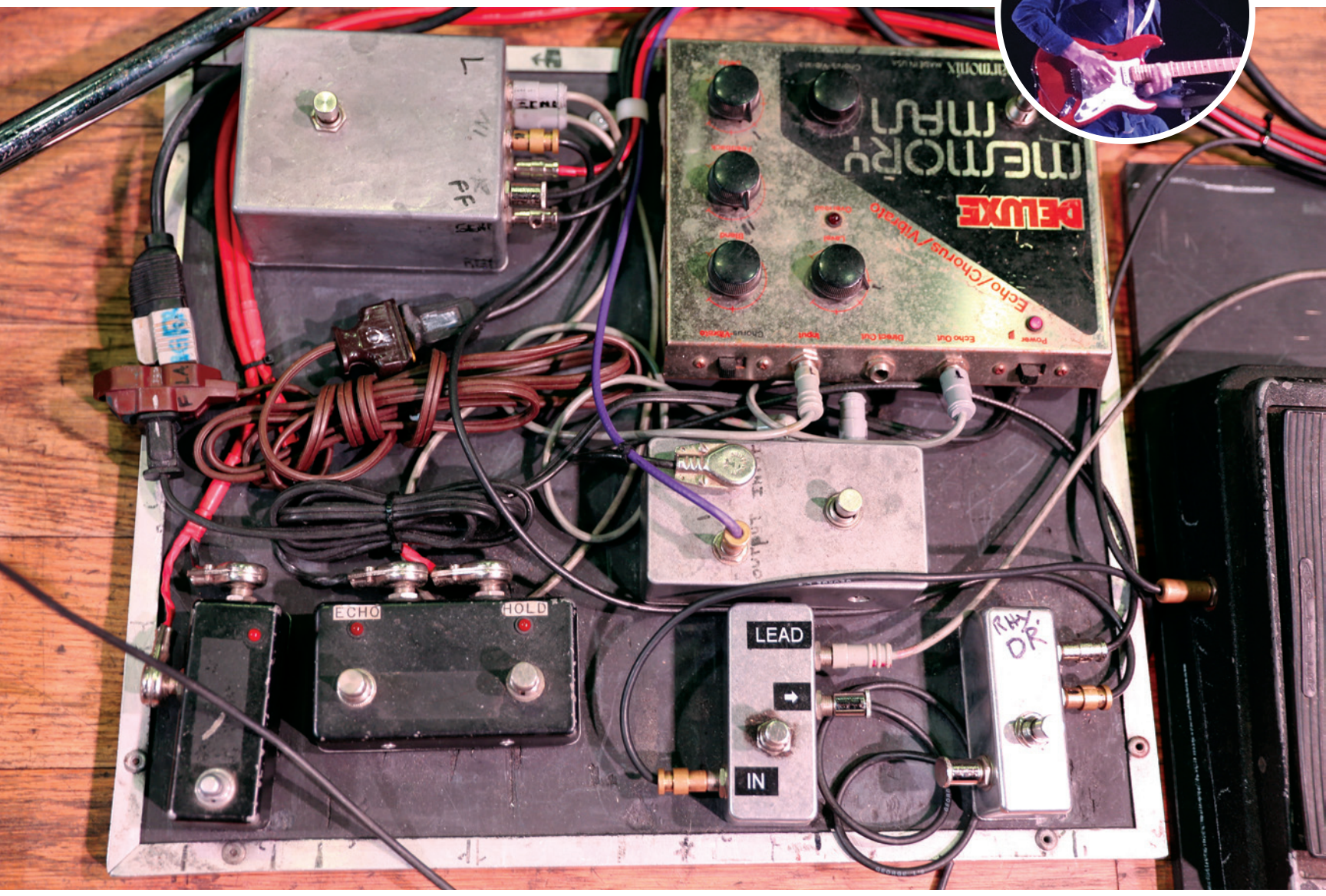
ERIC JOHNSON



During his 2018 tour, tone connoisseur Eric Johnson went to typically meticulous lengths to recreate the sounds from his breakthrough 1990 album, *Ah Via Musicom*—although not without some twists. For instance, while he continued to rely on vintage Echoplex tape delays, the two he took on this tour were modded by Bill Webb of Austin Vintage Guitars to bypass the finicky magnetic-tape portion of the apparatus and instead route the signals from a Catalinbread Belle Epoch Tape Echo pedal and two MXR Digital Time Delay rack units (all three not shown) through the Echoplex's lovely-sounding preamp. Johnson also uses a TC Electronic Stereo Chorus+ Pitch Modulator & Flanger stomp (top).

You can practically smell the "vintage" emanating from this pedalboard, with all the gray patch cables and power cords from yesteryear. However, besides the loop activator for Johnson's old Electro-Harmonix Deluxe Memory Man—which he typically uses with clean sounds—most of what's going on here has to do with switching between four amps: a 50-watt 1969 Marshall plexi driving a Marshall 4x12, the guts from a pair of 1966 Fender Twin Reverbs retrofitted to head cabinets driving EVL-loaded Marshall 4x12s, and a Two-Rock Traditional Clean head driving a Marhsall 4x12 stocked with Celestion Vintage 30s.

Johnson's second board (opposite page) has a split personality: The Dunlop Cry Baby wah feeds his Marshall head via an Echoplex and a B.K. Butler Tube Driver pedal (both not shown), while a '60s Dallas-Arbiter Fuzz Face, a vintage Ibanez TS808 Tube Screamer, and an MXR Flanger/Doubler (not shown) feed the Two-Rock setup.

Top: Photo by John Bland

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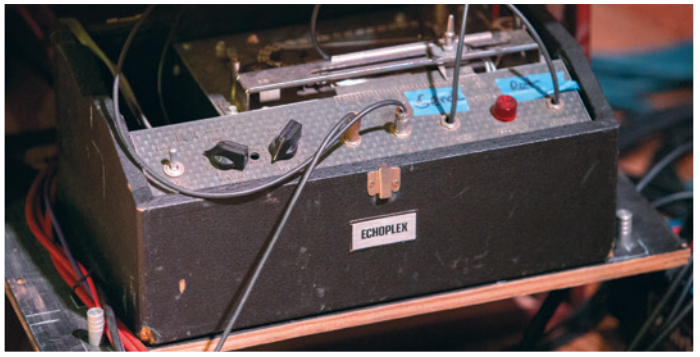

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Compared to Caivano's setup, bandmate Dave Wyndorf's board is practically barebones, with nothing more than a Line 6 Relay wireless receiver and a Morley A/B box feeding three delays: an MXR Carbon Copy, a TC Electronic Flashback, and an SIB Electronics Mr. Echo.

Top: Photos by Elliot Levin

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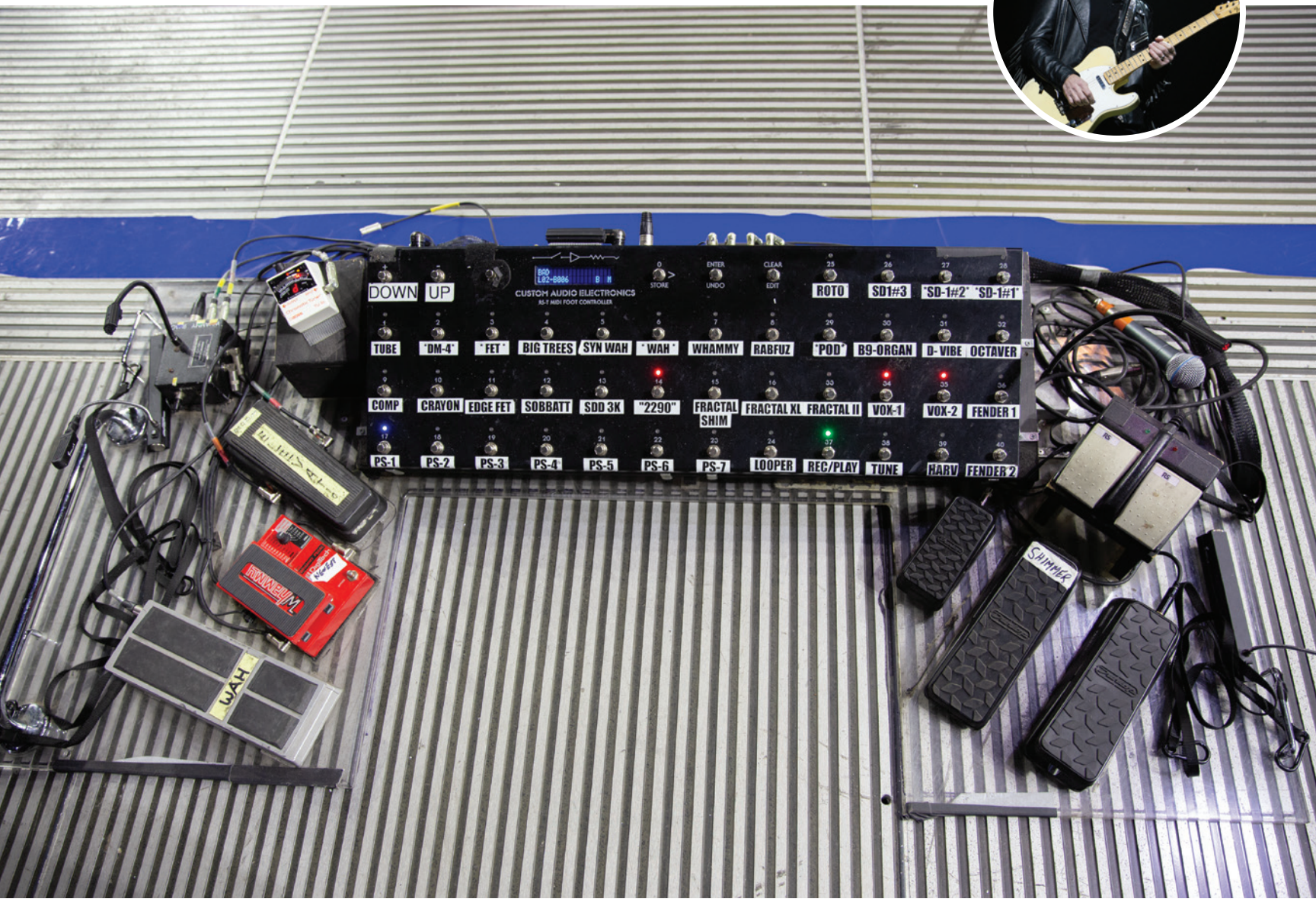
THE EDGE



For years now, U2 guitar legend the Edge has tapped rig-maker to the stars Bob Bradshaw to route and program his über-elaborate switching system. The effects are controlled by two Bradshaw RS40 controllers. One is onstage (center), and the other is offstage being overseen by longtime tech Dallas Schoo. Adjacent to the onstage RS40 are a DigiTech WH-1 Whammy, a Boss 500V expression pedal (which governs a CAE remote wah), two Dunlop Volume (X) pedals (one controlling reverb parameters and one controlling delay settings), and a Dunlop Volume (X) Mini for manipulating pitch shifting.

Edge's "pedalboard" controls two large rack units (opposite page) containing a variety of rack processors, stompboxes, and auxiliary devices, including a Korg Pitchblack rack tuner, multiple Fractal Audio Systems Axe-Fx II XLs, three Line 6 units—a custom DM4 Pro Rack, a Pod Pro, and an M5 Stompbox Modeler—a Korg SDD-300, an Ibanez TS9 Tube Screamer, six Boss stomps—an FA-1 FET boost, a CS-2 Compression Sustainer, an OC-3 Super Octave, and three SD-1 Super Overdrives—a Fender prototype distortion pedal, a Diamond Pedals VIB1 Vibrato, an Electro-Harmonix B9, a DigiTech Synth Wah, a Voodoo Lab Pedal Power Mondo, four MIDI Solutions Mergers, a JHS Crayon, a Sobbat DB-2 Drive Breaker, and several Bradshaw-designed Custom Audio Electronics splitters, loop boxes, and interfaces. All of it runs through Furman PL-PRO DMC E power conditioners.

Top: Photo courtesy of U2start

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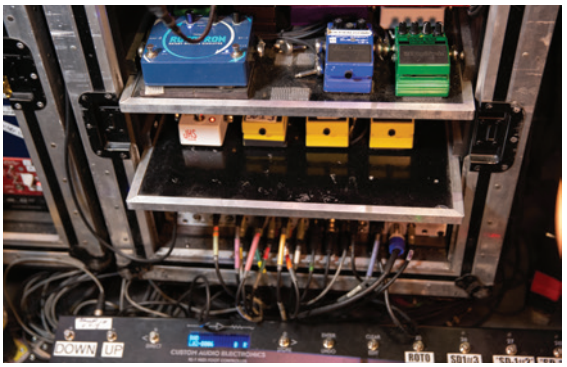

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RED FANG

Besides a tuner, the only pedal Red Fang's Bryan Giles uses is an Electro-Harmonix Pitch Fork, which he employs to add a bit of an octave effect. He also sometimes dimes the Pitch Fork's shift knob to approximate sounds that would normally require lugging around a separate, drop-C-tuned guitar.

In comparison to Giles' board, co-guitarist David Sullivan's (opposite page) is almost self-indulgent, with four times the number of signal mashers: a Mr. Black Thunderclaw, an EarthQuaker Devices Dispatch Master, an MXR Phase 95, and a DigiTech Drop, with a TC Electronic PolyTune2 Mini keeping the guitars in tune.

Top: Photos by Izaac Cioban

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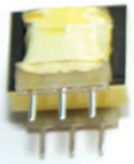
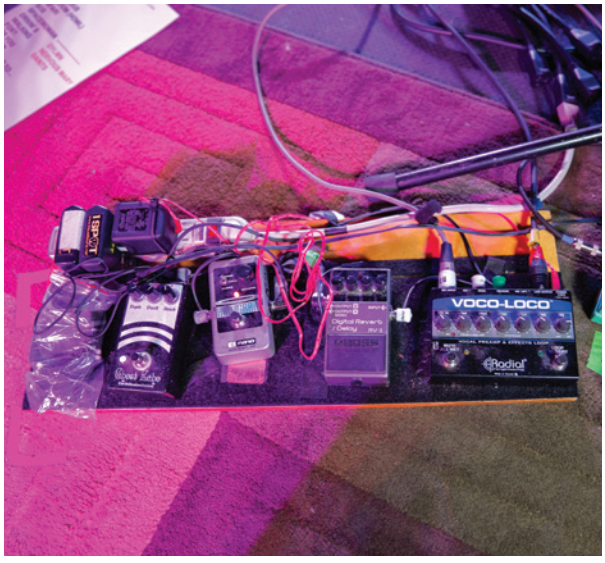


THE BREEDERS



Alt-rock icon Kelley Deal's pedalboard is lean and mean, sporting a Boss TU-3 tuner, an Ibanez Tube king, an EarthQuaker Devices Afterneath, a Boss DD-3 digital delay, a TC Electronic Hall of Fame Reverb, a Boss GE-7 Equalizer, and a Boss PN-2 Tremolo/Pan (barely visible, off the board to the left). Another GE-7 that's kept on top of Deal's Marshall head is used to boost her Stratocaster's level to match her Les Paul's.

Deal also runs a second pedalboard for vocals. The chain starts with a Radial Engineering Voco-Loco that enables her to route her XLR mic input through a side loop of 1/4" cables to standard guitar effects, such as a Boss RV-3 Digital Delay/Reverb, an Electro-Harmonix Holy Grail Nano, and an EarthQuaker Devices Ghost Echo. All are powered by a Truetone 1 SPOT.

Breeders bassist Josephine Wiggs' board (opposite page) features three Boss units—a TU-2 tuner, a GEB-7 Bass Equalizer, and a DD-3 digital delay, all feeding an Ampeg SCR DI and a Frantone Peachfuzz (the latter of which was not seeing active duty when we caught up with the band).

Top: Photo by Rich Osweiler

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LEFT TO RIGHT: RGD61ALMSCLL | RGA61ALIAF | S61ALBML

RON ASHETON

*The guitar anti-hero who started **the Stooges** and changed the course of rock 6-string's future, paving the way for … everything.*

BY TZVI GLUCKIN

Photo by Ken Settle

Late 1960s Ann Arbor, Michigan—a sleepy college town about 45 minutes west of Detroit—is the unlikely birthplace of punk. But it was there, led by a local band called the Stooges, that America's most visceral, degenerate export was born.

The Stooges weren't Eastern Michigan's most popular band at the time. That honor went to the MC5. But the Stooges may have been the most important—even compared to Michigan artists like Bob Seger, Alice Cooper, and Ted Nugent, that would go on to sell out arenas in the next decade. The Stooges classic songs, like "T.V. Eye" and "I Wanna Be Your Dog," have been covered over and over by numerous artists. The chaos they inspired is today standard behavior at most punk, hardcore, alternative, indie, and metal shows. They embraced noise. They were aggressive and confrontational. They weren't hippies, despite their late-'60s pedigree. They were ahead of their time and—this isn't clichéd or hyperbolic—pioneered the next half-century of alternative rock.

In addition to his band's influence, the Stooges' guitarist, Ron Asheton, made a significant impact as well. He embraced power chords. His tone was grating and jagged. He didn't play with that vintage tube warmth associated with many of his contemporaries. And he loved feedback and noise. As his band's only guitarist, he found ways to make his 6-string sound like more than one instrument. He explored non-Western tonalities and experimented with drones.

In hindsight, the Stooges are famous for their nihilistic, antagonistic performances and their lead singer's self-destructive antics—some say Iggy Pop invented stage diving and crowd surfing—as well as their straightforward, no-nonsense songwriting, *and* Asheton's innovative guitar playing. But at the time, no one was interested. The Stooges released three albums that didn't sell well. They played to half-empty clubs and were taunted and harassed by their audiences. They didn't have a loyal fan base and they weren't popular overseas. In 1974, plagued by drug use and mismanagement, the Stooges broke up.

Not that anyone noticed.

But payback is sweet. The mainstream may have ignored the Stooges, but the underground grew to adore them. Over the next three decades, young bands dissected their music, copied their sound, and used them as a starting point to invent new genres and movements. Their legend grew and their albums, while never radio-friendly, continued to sell.

In 2003, after a 29-year hiatus, the Stooges regrouped with Mike Watt on bass for a one-off performance at the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival. That performance led to a tour, which led to a full-fledged reunion. But unlike the old days, the reunited Stooges headlined major festivals and played to enthusiastic crowds numbering in the tens of thousands. What's more, they weren't a nostalgia act. Their audiences were young and the old-timers kept their distance. It was as if the culture had finally caught up with them.

Ron Asheton died in 2009, and although the Stooges' story has been told many times over, those retellings usually focus on the band's iconic countercultural status and Iggy Pop's larger-than-life persona. Much less has been written about Asheton's guitar playing, sonic choices, and gear. Our hope is to remedy that. We spoke to his family, roadies, old friends, collaborators, and bandmates, and bring you this picture of an important and influential talent.

The Beginning

Ron Asheton was born in Washington, D.C., on July 17, 1948. His father's business took the family to Davenport, Iowa, and then, following his dad's heart attack, to Ann Arbor, Michigan. "Our mom's parents and family were in Michigan," Kathy Asheton, Ron's younger sister says. Ron was the oldest of three siblings. Stooges drummer Scott Asheton was in the middle. "They decided—not sure how our dad would be doing—to move so we could be near family. Sadly, about a year later, our father passed away, in December, 1963."

Asheton's mother, while still in Iowa, encouraged her children to take music lessons. Ron studied the accordion, Scott—years before discovering rock 'n' roll—took drum lessons, and Kathy sang. Those music lessons stopped with the family's move to Michigan—along with the uncertainty that accompanied their father's illness and early death—and Ron put his interest in music on hold.

At least, until the Beatles played *The Ed Sullivan Show*. "The Beatles came in February of '64, right after our father passed away, and that got Ronny going," Kathy says. "From that point on, that's what he wanted to do. He wanted to play guitar. He wanted to be the Beatles. So that's how that started for him."

He also traveled to England, along with future Stooges bassist Dave Alexander, during his senior year in high school. "There was a good friend of his—also from a very good family in Ann Arbor—and they had moved to England," Kathy Asheton says, putting to rest a number of myths about her brother's early days. "It wasn't like he was just floating off into a land of strangers. He had a family connection there, which was part of the, 'yes, you have permission to go.' It was the biggest thing. He'd write letters. Ronny wrote letters to Bill Cheatham—who was his best, dearest friend [*Editor's note: Cheatham was a roadie for the Stooges and also played second guitar in the band for a short period, before being replaced by James Williamson.*]—saying that he met Ringo. They started a rumor in high school that 'Ronny met Ringo.' But it was really a joke. He never did meet anybody. He saw the Who there, but he didn't meet any of them."

After he returned, Asheton played bass in a number of local bands, often running through a fuzz pedal and wah-wah, including the Chosen Few, which included future Iggy

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and the Stooges guitarist James Williamson. He also shared a stage with the Prime Movers, whose drummer was Iggy Pop.

"He met Iggy at the local Discount Records," Kathy says. "That's where Iggy worked, and that was the music hub of Ann Arbor, where everybody connected."

Ron—as a guitarist—started the band that would eventually morph into the Stooges original line-up, featuring Pop, Alexander on bass, and his brother Scott on drums. "We were all shook up when our father passed away, but Scotty took it very hard," Kathy Asheton says. "He was hanging out with, say, the wrong people and our mom was concerned about that. Ronny took Scotty under his wing and took him to all the Chosen Few shows, just to keep an eye on him. Scotty was like their little roadie at the gigs. He would help out with the drum kit, and that's when he started taking more interest in playing drums."

The band's original name was the Psychedelic Stooges, which was a tip of the hat to the Three Stooges. "Ron was a huge fan of the Three Stooges," says Deniz Tek, the guitarist in the legendary Australian punk band Radio Birdman and an old friend of Ron's from Ann Arbor. "At one point, when he was a kid, he was the president of the Three Stooges fan club. Later, when Ron was living in Hollywood, he knew Larry Fine from the Three Stooges. Larry was in a nursing home in Beverley Hills and Ron would often go visit him and help him out with answering his fan mail and stuff like that. He would get cigars and whisky for him."

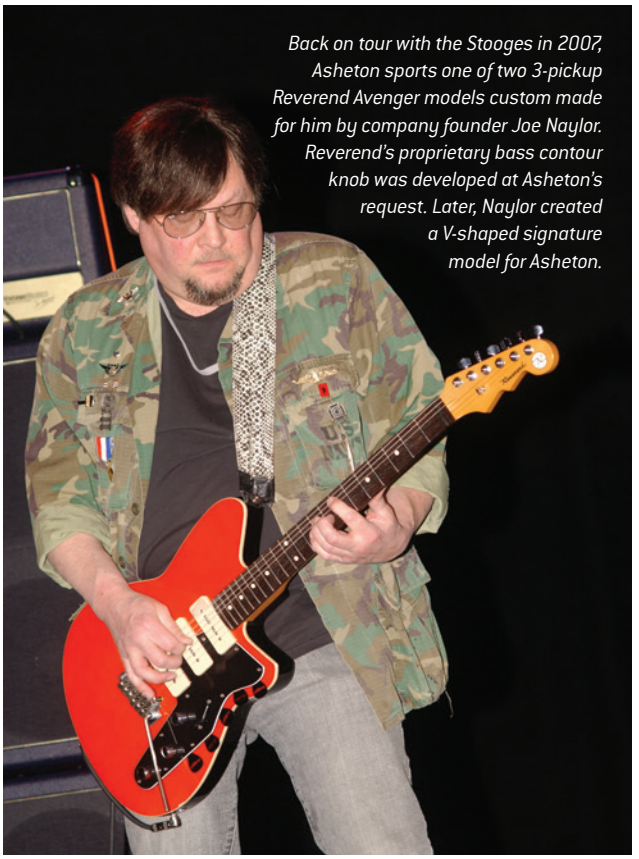
The early Stooges didn't sound like anything else. They were loud, raucous, raw, free, and improvisatory. They didn't have a set list—or even established songs—and crafted each performance to fit the event. Their focus wasn't developing a repertoire, but putting on a show and making each night an experience.

"They were doing what they called 'Energy Freakouts,' or jams," Tek says. "It was fascinating to me as a teenager to attend those shows, because I never saw anything like it. Scotty would bang on 44-gallon oilcans with steel pipes. Iggy made noise, putting mics in blenders and things like that. Ron just had this raw guitar mayhem. They would adapt it to the gig."

"The gigs were one big jam," Mike Watt (Minutemen, Firehose) says. Watt was the Stooges' bassist throughout their 2003-'14 reunion. "Ronny told me about making noise with an electric blender, Dave Alexander throwing the amp down to make sounds, and Scotty beating oil drums with their horoscope signs painted on them. It was a whole different thing than what we know from Stooges' albums."

Elektra Records

The band had a summer sublet, where they first practiced and got their act together, although the Asheton's basement was their primary rehearsal space. Their first show was at a house party on Halloween in Ann Arbor. They gigged around town and in nearby Detroit, and became part of a scene that included the MC5, the Up, Bob Seger, and Alice Cooper.



Back on tour with the Stooges in 2007, Asheton sports one of two 3-pickup Reverend Avenger models custom made for him by company founder Joe Naylor. Reverend's proprietary bass contour knob was developed at Asheton's request. Later, Naylor created a V-shaped signature model for Asheton.

Photo by Frank White

"The whole music scene started in the early '60s with the Rationals," Kathy Asheton says. "Bob Seger was here. Alice Cooper ended up moving here as well. We had a huge music scene and lots of local bands, but by that time the Stooges and the MC5 were playing mostly ballrooms in the Detroit area, like the Grande, Cinderella, and the East Town."

It was as part of that thriving local scene, and opening for the MC5 at a gig at the University of Michigan—at the Michigan Union building—when fortune smiled upon the Stooges. Danny Fields, the legendary A&R man who was doing publicity for the Doors at Elektra Records at the time, was sent to Ann Arbor to sign the MC5.

"Of course, this is well-documented and legendary," Tek says. "Danny Fields saw the Stooges open for the MC5 and he was enthralled by their presence. He was motivated to call Jac Holzman [*the head of Elektra*] and say, 'We're signing the MC5 and we need to sign these guys, too.' Holzman said, 'Offer them $5,000.'"

And just like that, the Stooges were signed to a major label. They didn't have a fan base outside of Michigan. They didn't have songs. But they had something, and that something was to prove influential. They were whisked off to New York to record their first album, and John Cale, from the Velvet Underground, produced it.

"When they signed to Elektra, they had to come up with songs," Tek says. "Ron told me that about two weeks before

they went to New York, John Sinclair [*the MC5's manager and a famous '60s radical*] came by their house with a stack of albums—and among those albums were things like Pharaoh Sanders, Albert Ayler, John Coltrane, and Yusef Lateef. They took some of those albums with them to New York. The night before the first session with John Cale, they were listening to those records and coming up with riffs based on that stuff." "The bass line in 'Little Doll,'" Watt adds. "That's Dave Alexander's version of Pharaoh Sander's 'Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt.'"

If they were worried about songwriting before arriving in New York, it doesn't show. That first album, their eponymous debut, is chock full of classics. It contains the oft-covered Stooges' staples "I Wanna Be Your Dog," "No Fun," "1969," and the 10-minute mantra "We Will Fall."

"You've got to understand, being with these guys, I would ask them 10 million questions," Watt says about the recording of "We Will Fall." "I asked them about that tune. It came from a Dave Alexander chant. They ran out of hash and they wanted to get stoned. Dave Alexander said he knew this chant, that if you chanted this thing, you could get stoned. I had always thought it was from John Cale, so he could play viola."

That first album also shows the hallmarks of Asheton's songwriting and sound: one-chord vamps, ostinato patterns, unhinged-but-blues-based solos, fuzz, and copious amounts of wah. "He developed a style that was out of the electric blues," Tek says. "But a very original and unique version of electric blues—much harder edged and cooler. Most guys who pick up a guitar play blues licks. It wasn't that. It was back down to the really hard roots of blues. Then a little bit later on he added some jazz elements into it."

Being the band's only guitarist, keeping an open string ringing was a clever way to fill space and create the illusion of a second rhythm instrument. It was also in the air—part of the culture of the '60s—and, along with quarter tones and other non-Western notes, owed an obvious debt to India and the Middle East.

Drones were integral to Asheton's style, but he didn't use alternate tunings. "He just used standard tuning," J Mascis (Dinosaur Jr) says. Mascis toured with Watt and the Asheton brothers in the years leading up to the Stooges reunion. "I was impressed, you know. The first time he played you could tell he had never stopped playing."

Asheton's gear choices were standard for the times as well. "I didn't see the Stooges until about 1968, so I can't speak for before that," Tek says. "But in '68 Ron was using a Strat. I think it was a 1957 sunburst Strat. Initially he was playing through a Vox Super Beatle amp, and then he went to Sunns and Marshalls. He also had a Flying V in those early days. He had a Vox wah-wah pedal and an Arbiter Fuzz Face. I think he was then playing through 100-watt Marshall Super Leads and he may have had a Marshall Major as well."

"His fuzz tone was the round one that Jimi used," Watt says. "Jimi Hendrix played in Ann Arbor at the Fifth Dimension. There were about only 100 people there and no one would come up to the stage. Ron did, because he said he wanted to look at what Jimi was using. He said he had these fuzz

tones that were kind of harsh, but they were round. Plus he had a wah-wah, curly chords, and he said that Jimi was wearing a high school marching band jacket. Ronny was the only one who walked up and went to the front of the stage to see *fucking Jimi Hendrix*. What a trip."

The Stooges recorded their second album, their magnum opus, *Fun House*, in the spring of 1970 with producer Don Gallucci from the Kingsmen. (You know, "Louie Louie.") The album is raw and was recorded somewhat live. It contains some of their most important songs: "T.V. Eye," "Dirt" (the bass line is epic), "Loose," and "1970." Plus, the album's closer, "L.A. Blues," documents to tape—at least, as best as you can—the Energy Freakouts of their pre-record deal days.

"Their songs always had parts," Watt says. "Especially something like 'L.A. Blues,' which is a big freak-out at the end of *Fun House*. But, for sure, that was never played the same way twice. We played it every gig, after the song 'Fun House.'"

But despite being signed to Elektra, and with two albums under their belt, the Stooges weren't able to grow their audience. "It became apparent very early on that they weren't real popular, to put it bluntly," Kathy Asheton says.

The band had internal problems as well—especially drugs, which were the beginning of the end. Alexander was fired sometime in August or September of 1970 and died five years later from the ravages of excessive drinking. Pop was struggling with harder drugs. Asheton was clean, but that wasn't enough to keep the band together. "Ronny never got into the drugs," Kathy says. "He was very angry when the Stooges broke up, because he was just sitting by and watching this all deteriorate."

Near the end of their initial run, James Williamson was added as second guitarist, which turned out to be a harbinger of things to come. The band broke up, David Bowie befriended Pop and got him a deal with his management company—Tony Defries' MainMan Management—and Pop and Williamson moved to London to write and record a new album.

Iggy and the Stooges

"When James and Iggy took off to go to London and regroup—what became Iggy and the Stooges—they had not considered Ronny and Scotty," Kathy Asheton says. "But later on, both of them claimed that it was their idea to call them. So we really don't know [whose idea it was to] call Ronny and Scotty to bring them over to England to do *Raw Power*. They both said yes. They were not ready to throw in the towel. They still wanted to play."

On *Raw Power*, Asheton became the band's bass player, with Williamson as sole guitarist. Ashton's bass playing is melodic and tight—he's not just playing roots—and the foundation he lays down with his brother is solid.

"I know by playing the bass parts that Ronny invested time," Watt says. "Those are good parts. Smart parts. It's stuff he's doing in the moment. Also, they are playing to James Williamson, who's got a whole different style. Ronny had a lot of little details in his bass playing—lots of detail and also fills between the changes."

According to Watt, Asheton used a Guild bass (probably a JS II). "They were full scale but they looked like an EB-3," he says. According to Tek, his amp was either an SVT or a Sunn 2000.

"He was a good bass player and took to it," Kathy Asheton says in contrast to rumors that Asheton resented switching to bass. "He was into it. There weren't any qualms. And again, I want to emphasize, a lot of the reason it was okay in that lineup was because Ronny and Scotty were together. That was the impetus to their purpose to continue playing."

But outside factors and drug use also doomed this unit, and by early 1974 the Stooges called it quits. (A live concert from February 1974 was released in 1976 as *Metallic K.O.* You can hear the audience's hostility on the recording, including bottles breaking and Pop's constant taunting.)

Following the Stooges, Asheton formed the New Order (not to be confused with the '80s post-Joy Division band, New

BUILDING ASHETON'S SIGNATURE MODEL

For the Stooges' first reunion gig at Coachella in April 2003, Ron Asheton used a black, Mexican-made Strat. But once the band was officially back together, he reached out to eastern Michigan builder Joe Naylor, of Reverend Guitars, to discuss a 6-string.

"I met Ron in the late '90s," Naylor says. "He played Naylor amps, which was the company I had before Reverend. He wanted something with three single-coil pickups. The classic setup for him with Iggy had been a Stratocaster, but he was looking for something a little fatter sounding. He also wanted the option to be able to thin the sound out for the traditional Strat sound if he had to do that."

Naylor's solution was a passive bass-roll-off control. "I built him a 3-pickup guitar, which back then was called the Avenger model, and I installed a knob on it that would cut bass out of it," Naylor says. "It was a variable knob. He had full control over how much he wanted to thin out the sound. If he turned the knob all the way off, it sounded like a traditional Strat. That later became the Reverend bass contour control, which we use on almost every guitar now."

Asheton's signature V, which Naylor designed a few years later, was made with a stop tailpiece, a set neck, and three P-90s. "It sounds kind of like a giant Strat," Naylor says. "He wanted that attack that you get from a single-coil pickup. Of course, a P-90 *is* a single coil pickup … it's just a large one, but it does retain some of that string attack, which is essential to that Stooges ferocity."

Proceeds from the sale of Asheton's signature V go to support the Ron Asheton Foundation, which works to help abused, abandoned, and orphaned animals, and partners with various humane societies.

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Order) with former MC5 drummer Dennis Thompson. The New Order broke up in 1976. Asheton then joined Destroy All Monsters, fronted by the Detroit-based visual artist and singer Niagara. Later, that band morphed into Dark Carnival.

"Ronny's stance was always, 'I am a musician, that's what I do,'" Kathy Asheton says. "One way or another he kept it going for those 30 years in between. They were also getting royalties from Bug Music [*a music publishing company that was sold to BMG in 2011 for $300 million*], so Ronny and Scotty had some money from the Stooges. Those albums kept selling, but here's the thing nobody knew: It was James Williamson who reached out and told Ronny and Scotty, 'Hey, you know, there's this company and they're collecting royalties.'"

Asheton also dabbled in acting. His biggest role was in the film *Mosquito*, which starred Gunnar Hansen from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. It was also through film that Watt first got the chance to play with him. "The first time I played with Ron was on the soundtrack for a Todd Haynes' movie called *Velvet Goldmine*," Watt says. "The movie had a David Bowie character and another character kind of based on Kurt Cobain and Iggy. They wanted some music for that character and he had a band called the Wylde Ratttz. They figured, if it's going to be like the Stooges, why not get the real Stooges guy?" That band, which also included Thurston Moore and Steve Shelley (Sonic Youth), Don Fleming (Gumball), and Mark Arm (Mudhoney), recorded "T.V. Eye" for the film, plus an album's worth of material that was never released.

The Stooges Revisited

In 2000, Watt was recovering from a life-threatening illness. "I had tubes in me and I couldn't play bass," Watt says. "When they pulled the tubes out of me and I started hankering to play—to get gigs, not just get better—I asked J Mascis and he got Murph from Dinosaur Jr and we did some Stooges. When it came time for his solo album, J Mascis and the Fog, he asked me to be on bass."

"We did a couple of Stooges songs when Watt was my bass player, and he would sing," Mascis adds. "We were playing in Ann Arbor and I asked Watt, 'Why don't you call up Ron and see if he wants to jam? I know you know him from the Wylde Ratttz.' Ron came down and we played. I kept asking him if he wanted to go on tour, and so he toured with me and Watt for a while. We went to England and did different shows, and SXSW. Then Thurston Moore asked us if we wanted to do Stooges at a festival. He said, 'Why don't you get Scott Asheton, too?' That was the first time I played with Ron and Scott. It was in L.A. at the All Tomorrow's Parties festival that Thurston was curating. Eddie Vedder, Josh Homme, and Kim Gordon all sang different Stooges songs. We went out in the summer and we went on some festivals, and I think that's when Iggy heard about it, because we were playing around."

It was those Asheton, Asheton, Mascis, and Watt shows that piqued Pop's interest. "I remember Ronny told me about the call he got," Watt says. "It was Ig. 'Hey, who is this indie guy stealing my treasure?' Ronny told me that he said to him, 'My treasure? You know where I live.'"

"Scotty was the one who kept pursuing," Kathy Asheton says. "Every now and then, he'd call up Iggy and say, 'Do you want to get the band back together?' Iggy would say no. It would be the decade joke. 'Okay, so 10 years have gone by, what do you think? Do you want to get the band together?' No. 'Twenty years?' No. But it was really J Mascis, Mike Watt, Ronny, and Scotty. When they started playing Europe and doing all kinds of shows, they would do Stooges music and the people would go crazy and yell, 'Stooges! Stooges!' When Iggy heard rumors and saw the success that they were having, that's when he became interested."

Pop had the Asheton brothers play five songs on his 2003 solo release, *Skull Ring*. Ron played guitar and bass on those sessions. But the big news of that year was the official Stooges reunion—with Watt on bass—at Coachella.

"Ron used a Strat for the Coachella Festival that they played," Chris Wujak, Asheton's reunion-era guitar tech says. "I was not at that first show. The story I was told was that it was just a one-off. It was supposed to be a fun gig. But that turned into a tour, which turned into six years of touring, and then continued after Ron passed away."

Asheton's guitars, once the reunion was underway, were two Reverends—and eventually Reverend created a signature model as well. "Ron started using Reverend guitars at the beginning of the reunion," Joe Naylor, Reverend Guitar's founder, says. "He had bought a few Reverends at a music store in Ann Arbor, so he already knew about Reverend. When the reunion was getting ready to start, he contacted us and wanted to know if we could work with him on maybe a couple more guitars for the reunion."

Asheton's reunion-era rig, similar to the gear he relied on in the early days, was simple. He used an Ibanez Tube Screamer or Reverend Drivetrain II as a boost for solos—otherwise his distortion came from the amp—plus a Dunlop Cry Baby Wah and a Boss Chromatic Tuner, which he used as a mute. On tour, he rented amps, which were usually Marshall JCM800 heads powering two 4x12 Marshall cabinets. His strings were GHS Boomers—their standard .010–.046 set—and plastic picks (customized with a Stooges logo) that were the equivalent of a Fender medium.

The reunited Stooges were the real deal and, according to Watt, that different dynamic was noticeable as soon as Pop and the Ashetons got back together. "When me and J were playing with the Asheton brothers, it was different than with Ig and the Asheton brothers, because that's the Stooges. With Ig, they have their own language—their own authentic thing. The Stooges music has lots of dimensions to it, even though some parts seem very simple."

The reunited Stooges were not a nostalgia act. Watch the concert footage and look at the crowds, you won't find many elderly hippies or relics from yesteryear. For the most part, the audiences were young. "The people we were playing for, there were hardly any people our age," Watt continues. "The

people seeing the band were much younger, because people wanted to know about this."

"It was crazy," Kathy Asheton agrees. "I had thought, 'Can they really just resurrect the Stooges songs and be successful?' Boy was I proven wrong. That just took off like a bullet. People went crazy. You go into the shopping malls now and you see teenagers wearing Stooges t-shirts. There was a time when you'd go, 'My brother plays with the Stooges.' Who? And now almost everybody knows who you are talking about. That was the coolest, greatest thing ever. The success, oh my God, it was so big for them."

Ron Asheton died of a heart attack in early January 2009. His body was found in his house, the house he grew up in—the same house the Stooges used to rehearse in—a few days later. He was 60. The Stooges soldiered on. They brought James Williamson back from retirement and introduced songs from *Raw Power* into their shows. That line-up continued to tour and record—the Ron Asheton reunion-era Stooges had recorded an album of new material, *The Weirdness*, in 2007 as well—until Scott Asheton died, also of a heart attack, in 2014.

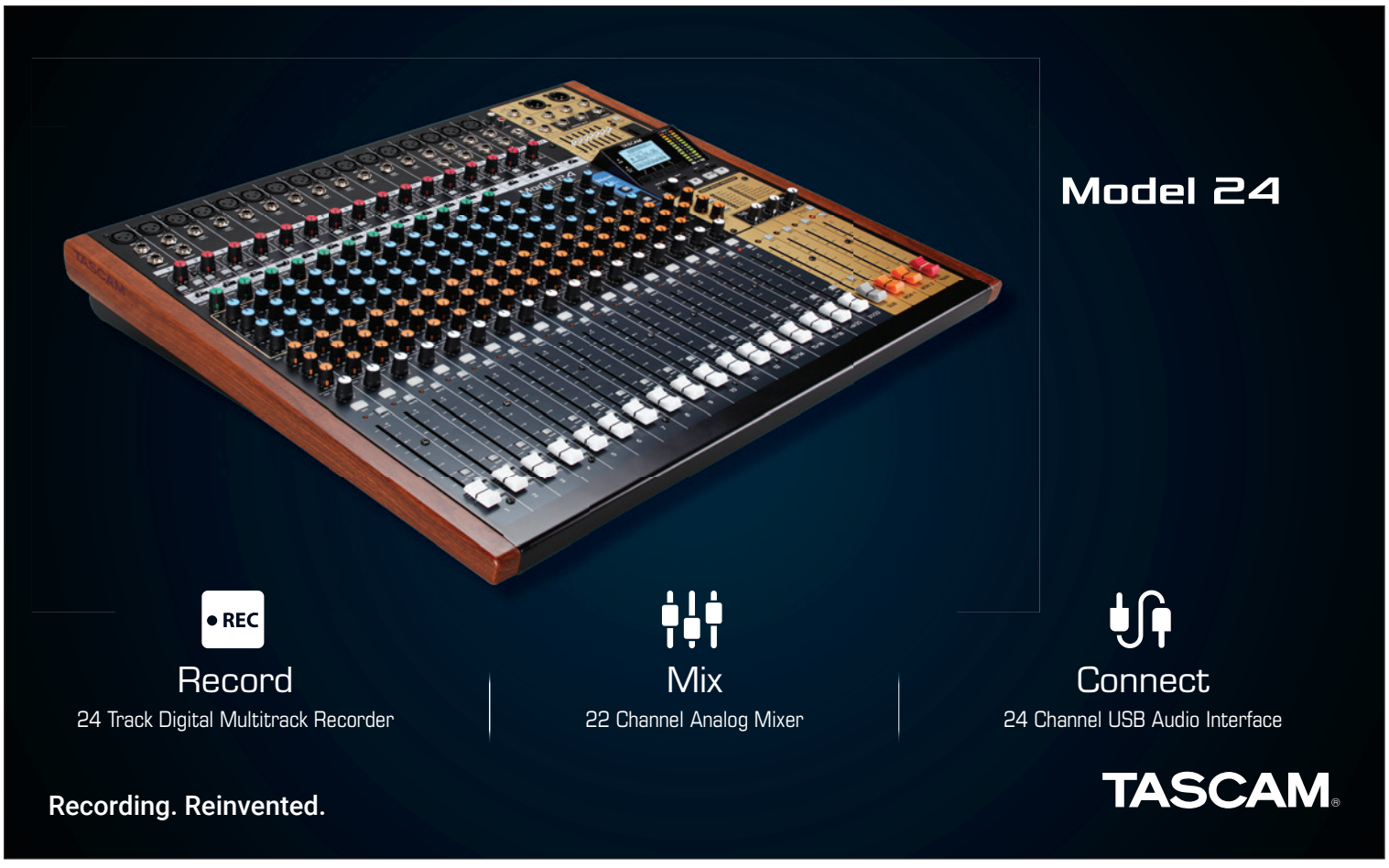
In 2010, the Stooges were inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. "I didn't want to go," Kathy Asheton says. "I felt a little bitter, I admit it, in the sense that it's too late. Ronny's gone and now you're giving them this award? I was happy for Scotty. I was happy for Jim (Iggy). I cried all the way through it. But I went to ghost him through it. I figured where he'd be in it, how he would be, and everything. That's how I handled that: just thinking that I am ghosting Ronny's position being there. It was the right thing to do, but it was hard."

Over the decades, the Sex Pistols, the Damned, Sonic Youth, R.E.M., Slayer, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Rage Against the Machine, Cage the Elephant, and many others have covered the Stooges' songs. Kurt Cobain, Slash, and publications like *Rolling Stone* have listed their albums as among their favorite and most influential. You'd be hard pressed to find a rock band that hasn't attempted a cover of "I Wanna Be Your Dog" at some point in their career. But that recognition was a long time coming.

"I remember Ron telling somebody once that he felt like the old blues guy on the porch," Watt says. "People, like us, coming up to him, wanting to know things. Everybody always knew where he lived, but took him for granted."

YOUTUBE IT

Ron Asheton tells the story of how the Stooges got together and formulated their sound in the first installment of a three-part interview at his mother's house in Ann Arbor in 1988. **YouTube search term:** Ron Asheton Interview 1988 Pt. 1



Keep It Quiet, Part 2

BY PETE THORN

PETER THORN *is an L.A.-based guitarist who has toured with Chris Cornell, Melissa Etheridge, Tsuyoshi Nagabuchi, and many others. He released a solo album,* Guitar Nerd, *in 2011. Read more at peterthorn.com.*

Isolation transformers like the Palmer PLI-01 (top) or Ebtech Hum Eliminator can come to the rescue if you're experiencing ground loops with your rig, so keeping one in your gig bag is a good idea.

Last month, we talked about sources of unwanted noises that originate from electric guitars. Now I'd like to address some common causes of extraneous, unwanted noises originating from wireless units, pedalboards, and amplifiers.

Ground loops are the enemy. What is a ground loop? It's a semi-complicated subject, but suffice to say that when you have more than one path to ground, ground loops can occur. And the net result is annoying buzz. Ideally, you want to ensure that all circuits are referenced to one point as ground.

Let's look at the basic example of using an A/B box to split your guitar signal to two amplifiers. If each amp is plugged into an AC-power source using a 3-prong cable, and you use two standard guitar cables to connect the amps from the sends of the A/B box, you will end up with a ground loop and the resulting characteristic buzz. If you were to use a 3-prong to 2-prong adapter as a "ground lift" on one amp's AC cable, the buzz would disappear since you'd be eliminating one path to ground. This will work in a *pinch*, but this method isn't really advisable or safe.

The best alternative is to use something called an isolation transformer on the instrument cable path, running from the A/B box to the second amp's input. The PLI-01 from Palmer and the Ebtech Hum Eliminator are just two examples of good options for this task. They essentially break the ground connection by using the *audio* path instead of the AC path, and are a much safer way to eliminate a ground loop. Many popular A/B boxes already have an "iso" switch built in to isolate one output, and the result is the same: the ground loop is broken and the buzz disappears.

Isolation is good (at least for your pedals). A regulated, isolated power supply is a must when it comes to powering pedals on a pedalboard and you want reliable low-noise power. I recommend avoiding the daisy chain-type power supplies if you can, and instead invest in a power supply that has all power outputs isolated.

Tubes, circa 2019. Most guitarists still use tube amps because they're hard to beat for their tone and simplicity. But tubes are made in China, Russia, or Eastern Europe now, and quality control varies wildly. Reliable, low-noise tubes are becoming harder to find, so it's best to *always* keep spares on hand. If your amp produces whistling, popping, or microphonic-feedback noises, the source could be a dodgy preamp tube. Low hum, excessive distortion, or rattling, however, can all be signs of a bad power tube.

One thing you can do is tap the tubes gently with a pencil (or something else non-conductive) and check if one tube sounds exceptionally noisy with ringing or crackling. If you think a preamp tube might be causing issues but the tap test fails to identify the culprit, replace one tube at a time and listen closely to see if the noise disappears. Power tubes, on the other hand, are more difficult, so it's best to consult an amp tech before replacing those.

Wireless systems. Modern digital wireless units generally sound terrific and there's usually not much involved with setting them up. Plug the transmitter into the guitar, run a cable from the receiver to your pedals (or amp), and you're good to go with tone and output very similar to using a good cable. But interestingly, noise issues can arise with some upper-end rackmount units that offer more in the way of flexibility.

On units that allow you to set transmitter output level and receiver input and/or output levels, always check to see if the tone, noise, and output is similar to using a cable. You may have to adjust levels on both the pack and receiver. I have found this with the Shure ULX-D system I use in Japan. It sounds terrific and I've *never* had a dropout, but I did have to tweak the system to dial the levels in with my setup. A/B with a cable and a relatively clean sound to dial in levels so they match. Also, it's very common for there to be a ground loop when using upper-end wireless units into guitar amps. You may need to use an isolation transformer on the audio line running from the wireless receiver's output to the input of your pedals or amp. Manufacturers take note: I'd love it if you included a switchable iso transformer on the 1/4" output of your wireless units!

Moral of the story: Carry spare tubes, and pick up an isolation transformer to keep on hand in case unexpected noises arise. My guitar rig has at least a few iso transformers in key places, and even with long cable runs and high gain, it's ground-loop free and quiet.

Until next month, I wish you low noise and great tone!

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THE LONE TROUBADOUR

*Wilco's **Jeff Tweedy** discusses making his debut solo album,* Warm, *with minimal gear: a '30s Martin, a '58 Esquire, and a Fender Princeton.*

BY DAVID VON BADER

Photo by Whitten Sabbatini

Jeff Tweedy has elevated the art of songwriting in the American tradition during his 32-year-long career—first as a cofounder of Uncle Tupelo, and then, since 1995, as the leader of Wilco. Both bands were planted firmly in the roots music tradition, drawing on folk, rock, psychedelia, blues, gospel, and other pages in the songbook of history. And today, Wilco is an ambitious group that straddles the terrain of the Byrds, the Band, Coltrane, Pops Staples, the Minutemen, and Pink Floyd—in a balance that fluctuates from album to album and, sometimes, song to song.

Throughout Wilco's evolution—over the course of 10 studio albums, a double live set, and collaborative recordings with Billy Bragg and others—Tweedy's songwriting has been the nucleus of the band's music. It is marked by poetic yet relatable introspection, and wit that's sharp and wry. Tweedy's gifted pen has earned Wilco seven Grammy nominations, including a win for Best Alternative Music Album for 2004's *A Ghost Is Born*. But Wilco has typically operated as a unit when it comes to arranging songs, and has benefitted especially from the talents of a pair of bona fide virtuosos: lead guitarist Nels Cline and drum phenom Glenn Kotche. The group leaves a distinctive sonic thumbprint, with whorls that bear the character of all six of its members.

Now, with his new debut solo album, *Warm*, Jeff Tweedy emerges for the first time as a musician truly carrying the full weight of his own art. It follows 2014's *Sukierae*, an album he penned and tracked with his son, Spencer, on drums, under the Tweedy moniker, but *Warm* is unadulterated. The album was written as a companion to his recently published memoir, *Let's Go (So We Can Get Back)*. These are songs that ruminate on a career of collaboration, but were created in near solitude. And while Tweedy's solo tracks sound familiar to Wilco's fare, *Warm* does have its own intimate charm. In addition to writing the songs, the Chicagoan played all of the guitars, basses, and even a good chunk of the drum parts.

Longtime fans already know Tweedy as a fervent champion of the guitar and an excellent player in his own right, but he's typically abdicated any fireworks on Wilco's albums to Cline since the guitarist joined in 2004. "I'm a passionate guitar lover," Tweedy explains, "but I've always hesitated to spend too much time talking about my playing, because I don't feel particularly insightful or like I have any kind of interesting technique to share. It's much more philosophical for me than it is for Nels—even though Nels is a deeply emotional player and not just some mathematician or something."

The truth is, Tweedy sells himself short as a player. Any doubt that he has a unique voice on the guitar should be quelled by *Warm*. Its sparse arrangements are built around his rock-solid acoustic rhythms and laced up with clever faux pedal-steel bends and delicate, creative passages on electric guitar. And speaking of guitars, anyone who's seen a photo of Wilco's legendary Chicago headquarters/studio the Loft can attest that Tweedy is a gear fiend, with a treasure trove of rare, vintage, and just plain *cool* guitars, amps, and more lining the walls. Nonetheless, the list of equipment used to track *Warm* is spare, although it includes rare vintage items like his beloved 1930s Martin 0-18 and an Italian Wandre Polyphon Beta.

PG recently spoke with Tweedy about creating *Warm*, his guitar passions (which include a love of dead acoustic guitar strings and top-loading Telecasters), and how he found the confidence to simply be himself as a musician.

TIDBIT

Tweedy played all the guitar and bass, and much of the drums, on his solo debut. "I found it really invigorating to be forced to confront my limitations and see how close I can get to something that I'm hearing in my head," he observes.

Reverb

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You own an incredible collection of rare guitars. Were any of them particularly important to writing the solo album?
Not so much on the writing end, but I recently got a '58 whiteguard Fender Esquire with a top-loader bridge that I tracked most of the electric guitar on the record with, so that was a pretty important guitar for this album. It suits my playing a lot better than other Tele guitars for some reason. It's just *that* much more responsive. I found it to be a lot more dynamic than some of the traditionally configured Teles I have, and I've never really had an Esquire to do an A/B with my other Teles before. I was kind of shocked by how much more I took to the Esquire, because I love a lot of my Teles and I'm not particularly against *any* guitar, to be honest, but it really opened up some of the fake pedal steel that I hadn't really done before.

You don't speak much about your background as a player.
I don't have much technique to rely upon, so I've shied away from doing many interviews about guitar playing, specifically. But I do love it and I do work at getting better. Not necessarily at scales or the traditional things that people use to measure their aptitude as a guitarist ... but I work hard to be able to play what I want to hear.

I had a revelation a while ago, when I was beating myself up at some point. A lot of guitar players are measured by how well-rounded they are these days. Can they comp jazz chords? Can they do Albert Lee licks? Guitarists seem to have to have a pretty big tool chest now, but my favorite players—like Hubert Sumlin or someone like that.... He was never measured by whether or not he could emulate anyone else's style! He was simply Hubert Sumlin, you know? That revelation has given me a lot more confidence to just turn that side of my brain off and focus on *communicating* with my tools.

I love talking about guitar, I love tone, and I love getting it to sound the way I want it to sound, but at the same time, I'm not overly precious about it. I do believe a performance has much more to do with why things sound good than a lot of people are willing to give it credit for. I find it really funny when people try and

chase down the exact gear someone used to get a sound—when they feel like they absolutely need to cop *that* tone. There's a whole industry built around providing that for people, but the fact is that most of those people making these classic records were just using whatever they could get their fucking hands on, you know? You want to sound like Link Wray? I think you should *play* like Link Wray on whatever gear you can afford or find. One of my favorites is Nick Drake, who has a Guild M-20 on the cover of *Bryter Layter*, but I don't think he ever played that guitar! There's an example of a guitar that shouldn't be hard to find, but has become hard to find probably in part because of that record cover.

Despite that, you and your cohorts in Wilco have amassed a truly incredible collection of gear. Did you experiment much with guitar tones on this album, and is option fatigue ever an issue when you have so many choices?

I can remember what combinations of things we own sound like, and I really surprise myself when we go back to recordings that we started three or four years ago and I remember specific combinations that were on each track, and stuff like that. I have more of an aptitude for *that* than playing scales. I really enjoy the process of getting sounds, but I also really prefer to move quickly, and it's more important to me to get a sound that's inspiring as opposed to going for the *best* sound.

For all of the gear that's at the Loft, I use a shockingly small amount of it, except when I have to recall a specialized thing that I'm aiming for. I go through periods where I'm really into a specific setup, and for the last couple of years, it's been a Princeton Reverb. For the most part, I'm pretty content to have this unadulterated, badass signal path that I know is going to, at the least, allow me to get an idea down quickly. If it needs to be something more elaborate or I feel like I need to make some kind of specific sonic statement, *then* I'll start plugging things into the chain and playing around with that sound. For a couple of years before I got into the Princeton, I was using a Fender Champ almost

The bedrock for Warm *was Tweedy's 1930 Martin acoustic with absolutely dead strings. "Sometimes I have to change the high E and B strings because they stop being intonatable when they get super, super gross," he says. "But the rest of them are just disgusting. They're horrifying and no one else in my band wants to pick up my guitar."*

JEFF TWEEDY'S GEAR

GUITARS

- 1930s Martin 0-18
- 1958 Fender Esquire (top-loader bridge)
- 1960s Wandre Polyphon Beta
- Fender Mustang bass (Alembic pickups)

AMPS

- 1970s Fender Silverface Princeton Reverb
- 1960s Fender Champ

EFFECTS

- Fairfield Circuitry Shallow Water

STRINGS & PICKS

- D'Addario EPN21 (.012–.051; unwound .020 replaces the wound .23)
- Custom Wilco-branded Dunlop Herco Flex .50 mm

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exclusively and that's all the sounds on [Wilco's 2015] *Star Wars* and the Tweedy record.

For the general process that I'm enjoying at the studio these days, I'm permanently set up and ready to go with a sound that I really love, but then there's all of the gear we have. That's a collection, yes, but it's more about it being an inspiring, *working* set of tools. That's the predominant reason why, when you see pictures of the Loft, there's *so* much gear out and available. It's important for me to be able to have that spontaneous moment where you walk by something and put your hand on it for no reason, and the next thing you know, you've picked it up and been inspired to play something. I think it's something in the subconscious that inspires you to pick up a particular instrument, for whatever reason it's speaking to you that day. That's the kind of work environment we've tried to foster at the Loft—just having these tools out, handy, and available to everyone.

Would you mind walking us through your core signal path on this album?
It's mostly that top-loader '58 Esquire straight into a silverface Fender Princeton Reverb. It's not a drip-edge model, but I don't know the specific year. I used an AEA N22 ribbon mic, for the most part. I know that amp really well, and where it drives in a way that's pleasant to my ear, and I'll sit on the couch and play and hear it through the studio monitors. For certain songs, I'll adjust settings on the amp to get what I want out of it. It really is super straightforward.

The bedrock of the album is acoustic guitar. What did you use?
My main guitar for years has been a '30s Martin. I'm not sure what the specific year is, but it's an 0-18 and it's pretty beat up. It's been broken and put back together a few times. It still has the original bar frets. There's not much left to them, but I'm really dreading having to make that change, and I'm going to put original bar frets back in it when I do refret it because I'm just so used to it.

Do you use specific strings to make it playable, with those old, small frets?
No, just dead strings. [*Laughs.*] I *never* change strings unless I absolutely have to, so it's honestly been so long that I don't know what's on it. They're most likely D'Addario, because we've been getting strings from them for so long. They're fairly light gauge, because it's such an old guitar and seems to respond better to a little bit lighter gauge than I'd

Photo by Tim Bugbee

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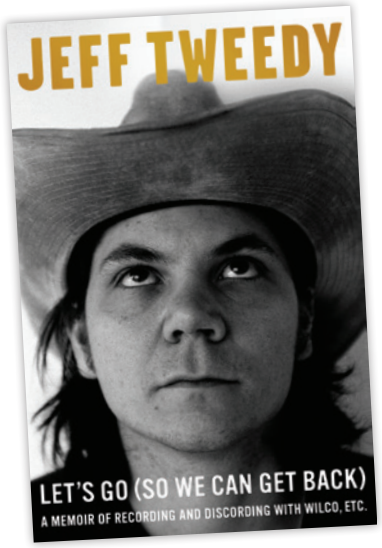

Jeff Tweedy released a best-selling memoir in late 2018, Let's Go (So We Can Get Back)*, which details his musical career with Wilco and beyond, and serves as a sort of companion release to his new solo album.*

put on some of my other guitars. But not super light. Sometimes I have to change the high E and B strings because they stop being intonatable when they get super, *super* gross, but the rest of them are just disgusting. They're horrifying and no one else in my band wants to pick up my guitar.

Why do you prefer dead strings?
It creates a guitar that's somewhere between a classical and a steel string, to my ear. It has a more narrow spectrum of overtones, which can get in the way, for me. I always feel like my singing voice is being upstaged by a new guitar that rings like a bell. My singing voice is like a frog or something, you know? I don't want to put that up against this pristine-sounding instrument. I'd rather have an instrument that feels and sounds a little downtrodden.

Is your songwriting approach for a solo album different than how you write for Wilco?
It really doesn't change that much. I don't ask much of myself when I'm in the writing phase of things. I just like making stuff. I try and stay in a frame of mind where there's a minimal amount of judgment going on, from my observing ego or whatever you want to call it. I really love making songs up and I'm in a fortunate position where I have a studio and a lifestyle that allows me to come to the studio every day and make stuff up, so I accumulate a lot of material. The process from there is really, "can I put these songs across by myself?" That was the primary concern with putting out a solo record. The genesis for most of this material has been the same for a long time.

Did you enjoy handling all of *Warm*'s guitar?
I found it really invigorating to be forced to confront my limitations and see how close I can get to something that I'm hearing in my head. In a lot of cases—especially on this record—I had to really take the time to teach myself how to do things and learn what bends would create the effect I was looking for, like a pedal-steel part. I know I don't get it *right* always, but it's exciting. When people misread things and I play my idea of a pedal-steel part, not an actual pedal steel, in a lot of ways that's more emotional than hiring

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It's a different process when Nels and I get together to work on Wilco songs, and it can actually be kind of daunting having the amount of options an incredible player like Nels brings to the table. It can be a struggle sometimes to narrow it down to what exactly you want to hear, so it ends up being a much different process for Wilco.

You've spent a long time working with Nels. What have you learned from that?

Playing with *all* of the guys in Wilco—and especially Nels and Glenn, who have really solid music backgrounds and read music and understand theory—has made me a lot better as a player. It's made us all better, when it comes to working with each other. I can transpose and I can do a lot of things now that I would've had to really hunker down and learn how to do at some point in my life, but I didn't. I feel pretty confident about a lot of those things now, and they're not really so specific as learning an exercise or something from Nels that changed my life. It's more osmosis, from just playing with really great musicians. I think the main thing that I've gotten from Nels, to be honest, is enthusiasm and encouragement for my playing. He's such a champion of the way that I play. Maybe it's because it's so different from his own approach, but Nels is always validating me and telling me really heartfelt, sweet things about what he likes about my approach to something on the guitar or as a songwriter, and he's just a great guy. That alone has given me so much more confidence to be comfortable in my own skin and continue to do what I'm doing.

That being said, one of the nice things about Wilco is that everybody wants to get better. We're all always trying to get better! It's so much fun to get better, you know? I think it'd be really awful to think that you'd figured out how to do everything you want to do on an instrument. My relationship is much more still playing with it to try and figure out what it can do in my hands, as opposed to maybe setting up a philosophy that forces me to stop exploring.

How has working with your kids changed your approach?

Spencer and [vocalist/photographer] Sammy both listen to tons and tons of music, but I listen to tons of music, too. I'm pretty insatiable when it comes to that, and I'm always looking for new records to be excited about. That's the way I lived my life, and outside of being a musician I think I'd still be doing that. Something really thrilling about being alive is people making shit and getting to enjoy it.

Playing with Spencer was a huge revelation. He's kind of like Nels or Glenn. He's a savant. He's such a natural musician compared to me and he's very patient with his dad and teaches me things all the time, but he's still growing as

YOUTUBE IT

In early January, Jeff Tweedy performed *Warm*'s "I Know What It's Like" on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, joined by his sons, Spencer and Sammy, as well as Blake Mills (playing a Gibson Barney Kessel model), James Elkington (sporting a Les Paul), and Liam Finn on bass.
YouTube search term: Jeff Tweedy – I Know What It's Like

a performer and a person, trying to consistently get what he wants out of himself. Aside from those things, which I can maybe teach him, his overall ability and aptitude is through the roof.

I love the arrangement of "I Know What It's Like," from *Warm*. Would you walk us through that track?
Yeah! It's that Martin 0-18 as the acoustic bed, and there are a couple of layers of bendy Fender Esquire with the reverb turned way up on the Princeton to approximate a pedal-steel sound and add texture, and then there's a couple of doubled parts played on a rare '60s Italian-made, aluminum-necked Wandre Beta, which was played through a Shallow Water pedal, made by Fairfield Circuitry. That pedal is weird and makes everything sound like it's on warbly tape. There are a lot of pedals that do that, but this is the one that sounds really musical, to my ears. That's the warbly chorus thing going on in the back that's almost a little new-wave sounding.

Those old Wandres are such wacky, interesting guitars, but never particularly inviting to play, in my experience. What drew you to that Wandre?
It's not really a guitar, right? It has this texture you can't get from much else. It's between a guitar and a banjo, and I don't know why it's so appealing to me, but it's all over the record. All of the little detail things that you hear on the periphery in the stereo spread is mostly the Wandre.

The arrangement and tuning on "The Red Brick" are interesting, too.
The stuff that sounds like a banjo is the Wandre, and the backwards desert blues kind of thing is the Esquire, and there's one guitar that's got most of its strings tuned to C and it's droning. Then there's one more guitar that's in standard tuning that's playing a riff that kind of takes it out of the key of C and makes the song a little more ambiguous sounding.

What bass is on that track? It sounds interesting.
I have a Fender Mustang bass that has Alembic pickups. It's a real oddball, and I haven't been able to find anything else that sounds like it.

> ***"I think the main thing that I've gotten from Nels, to be honest, is enthusiasm and encouragement for my playing. He's such a champion of the way that I play."***

One of Wilco's instrumental strengths is the 6-string partnership of Tweedy and Nels Cline, who joined in 2004. Cline's enlistment allowed Tweedy to realize his expanding vision of the band's sound.

This is what ends up happening with a lot of my gear. If I develop any kind of relationship with it, I can't get rid of it. It's just a weird, kind of crappy Mustang bass, but with those Alembic pickups, it sounds monstrous through a Fender Champ, and that's what you're hearing on that song.

My favorite fuzz tone is from one of my Fender Champs that has a replacement speaker in it that I've never seen before. I think it's from an intercom or something. It shouldn't be in a guitar amp and wasn't meant for that kind of power. For some reason, it sounds like the most incredible, gigantic fuzz tone, and everybody always asks what pedal I'm using when I play through that amp.

You've always had a real strength for adding interesting parts and nuanced adornment without losing the plot of a song.

Any advice for singer-songwriters looking to do the same?

You shouldn't be too precious about things. You can come up with the greatest part in the world and it might not make the song better. I'm *constantly* backtracking. I'll put something on a song and live with it for a few days, and I'll always make a point to go back to where I was before I made the transition to that different landscape and ask myself if it *really* made it better, or if it was better before—when it was more sparse. I'm not indecisive at all, and there are times when I just know that I've transformed something into something better. I think a lot of people just keep adding because they assume that's the direction you're always supposed to be moving in, but I think that it's really important to backtrack from time to time. We have a phrase for it: "That's a cool part, but it won't affect sales."

Photo by Debi Del Grande

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JOE CHARUPAKORN

Photo by Alex Morgan

Behind the board at his Mana Recording Studios in St. Petersburg, Florida, Rutan adopts a philosophy for his clients that he summarizes as, "My sound is bringing out the sound of the band."

TIDBIT

Erik Rutan says he expanded the core sound of Hate Eternal on his trio's new album by exploring more wide-ranging dynamics—something he learned to appreciate by listening to classical music.

"Stay out of the kitchen; call Chicken Magician," chimes Hate Eternal's Erik Rutan. He's in the green room of the White Eagle Hall in Jersey City, New Jersey, as he reminisces about that catchy slogan from his last day job. Given that the guitarist/vocalist/producer hails from the town of Red Bank, less than an hour from the venue, it's not surprising that he got a little nostalgic.

"The funniest thing about it is that I had, like, 50 Chicken Magician T-shirts at one point, because the owner insisted that I always wear one. Of course, I came to work and I never wore it, I never wore the hat, I didn't want anything to do with it," Rutan recalls. "He'd be like, 'Where's your hat and shirt? You're not representing the company.' I'd say, 'Oh, it's laundry day.' He'd be like, 'Don't worry, I got two more for you.' So, at some point, I had a ton of them, but when I moved to Florida, I got rid of them. Now it's a regret. If I only had *one* of those Chicken Magician shirts."

While the loss of his fried chicken emporium T-shirts might be a small regret, the trade-off proved to be enormous. He moved to the Sunshine State to record and tour with Morbid Angel, and that move shifted his career into extreme overdrive. Shortly after that, Rutan formed Hate Eternal in 1997, handling guitar and vocals for the band. Along the way he's managed to play on three more Morbid Angel albums. But that's just the tip of the iceberg. He is a seriously prolific dude!

Rutan, who studied production at N.Y.C.'s Institute of Audio Research, also made a huge splash in the production world after his work on Cannibal Corpse's iconic 2006 album, *Kill*. Since then he's become *the* producer of choice in the death metal world, shepherding three more Cannibal Corpse albums in addition to working on tons of recordings by genre leaders like Agnostic Front and Nile. The majority of the albums were done in Rutan's Mana Recording Studios, which he opened in 1999 in St. Petersburg, Florida. The site also houses Granville Guitars, a guitar and amp repair facility. As a producer, Rutan is known for his indefatigable work ethic and his willingness to push musicians past their breaking points, if necessary, to get the desired result.

Hate Eternal's latest, *Upon Desolate Sands*, is a perfect example of Rutan at his peak, as both producer and performer. The album features dynamics and classically inspired melodicism not often found in the death metal genre. Several songs are played way down from Rutan's usual C♯ tuning (C♯–F♯–B–E–G♯–C♯) to drop G♯ (on 7-string), adding to the massive sound. In addition to the expected heaviness, *Upon Desolate Sands* features reflective pieces like "For Whom We Have Lost," the instrumental that closes the album, which was written about two members of Rutan's family who recently died.

Premier Guitar caught up with Rutan just hours before Hate Eternal hit the stage for a death metal mega-concert also featuring Cannibal Corpse and Harm's Way. Amidst the chaotic backdrop of Cannibal Corpse's soundcheck, Rutan discussed making *Upon Desolate Sands*, his classic metal influences, and his ability to shred with action so ridiculously high that it's been dubbed "Mount Everest."

Photo by Edward Linsmier

***Upon Desolate Sands* is Hate Eternal's seventh album. Has anything changed in your approach to writing for the band?**
When I started Hate Eternal, I had this somewhat narrow-minded vision of creating this really extreme and aggressive sound. I've expanded that a bit, with more dynamics. That's probably the only thing. I've always had a melodic side, as well. I grew up in a classical family. I was inspired by a lot of classical music.

Who played what?
My dad played cello, my sister and grandmother played classical piano, and I played violin as a child. I was so young that I didn't take to it right away. As I got older, in my teens, I really grew to appreciate classical music: guys like Andrés Segovia and John Williams. When I first started playing guitar, it was guys like Eddie Van Halen, Randy Rhoads, Yngwie, and, of course, I loved Slayer and Metallica. James Hetfield was a big influence—from metal to thrash to wanting to create something a little bit more aggressive, which ended up becoming death metal.

Were passages like the harmony-guitars/bass-sans-drums ending in "Vengeance Striketh" and the intro to "For Whom We Have Lost" inspired by your classical background?
I don't read or write music. I have a really good ear, which obviously lends itself to what I do as a producer. I definitely attribute a lot of my harmonization and counterpoint to classical music: listening to Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, and Vivaldi. Every weekend my dad would have me sit and listen to composition after composition. And also, like, Iron Maiden and Judas Priest—those two bands were the kings of harmony. Metallica, too. Those three bands, metal-wise, completely inspired me with harmonization-meets-classical—double tracking solos and quadruple tracking rhythms, or triple-tracking stuff, sometimes. A lot of that is from Randy Rhoads. I always heard he did that on *Diary of a Madman* and *Blizzard of Ozz*, which were some of my biggest guitar-influence records.

On the outro to "All Hope Destroyed," you take a blistering solo over an interesting textural backdrop.
It's funny, you know, sometimes things just happen spontaneously. I had this vision of one guitar ringing out more like setting a background, and then this other guitar is kind of going freestyle. I just had this idea of one guitar in the middle just going for it.

How did you approach the mix to get that solo to stand out against the other parts that had a similar timbre and range?
Panning is always key. Throughout my career, my solo tone has always cut through, as well. I've always had a really nice solo tone. Part of it is just in the fingers, the hands, how I play. I like a cleaner tone. I like Marshalls.

You also have really high action on yourguitars.
I do have high action.

How were you able to play so fast on things like the solo on the new album's "All Hope Destroyed" with such high action?
I don't know, man. It just started when I started learning guitar. I really focused on rhythm playing—consistency and being tight. It's very rare to have high action and do a lot of soloing. It doesn't really work. But for rhythm guitar, I play very percussively, and it sits well. For solos, I guess I just got used to high action. So many guitarists overlook the importance of rhythm, and James Hetfield was a big influence on me, because his rhythm hand was ridiculous. Like *Master of Puppets*. When I heard those records when I started playing guitar, all that tight rhythm playing inspired me. I focused on rhythm for a good year or two before I even started soloing, just so I could really get it tight. When it came to soloing, I worked on that, too, and I just got used to the higher action.

I do play extremely hard and my action is so high that techs call it "Mount Everest." Even my luthier, Scooter Davis, of Granville Guitars, which resides in my studio—he sets up all my guitars, amps, and everything—is always amazed at how high my action is. It just feels comfortable and I love to get pure tone. I've lowered it a little bit over the years, because I was like, "This is ridiculous."

It seems like your sound isn't ultra high gain, but a lot of gain is later generated by the force of your attack.
It really is. That's the thing with a lot of higher-gain amps that sometimes I miss. I have a studio, so I own 14 or 15 amps. I have 5150s and ENGLs. Right now, I use a Dual Rec with a JCM800 live, because I like that combination.

I saw on your Facebook feed that you recently got a new JCM800 and, after a long search, it was only the second one that actually got your stamp of approval. What are you looking for in an 800?
I've had seven or eight of them over my whole career. I've had 50-watters, different years. I've had modded 800s. But I have this one 800—it's a '97 reissue from Guitar Center, and they made 200 of them from original parts, from the factory in England. And it's the one I've had for 15 years. I love it to death. It just might be a

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coincidence that it came from that year, but I compare everything to that amp. So when Scooter told me there was another one of those models online.... Well, it's taken me 15 years to actually find another one for sale, so I bought it immediately. It *does* sound different from my baby at home, but now I can leave my baby at home, untarnished.

This 800 I found on Reverb—what I wanted to do was have an effects loop in there. Scooter put in a loop made by Metropoulos. I didn't want to tarnish my original amp. I love it the way it is, and it's been my studio mainstay for so many records—Hate Eternal and other records. Actually, I think we used that 800 for solos on the last Cannibal Corpse record. So this one, I wasn't married to yet. We got [the loop] in and it didn't really change the sound. It sounds awesome.

Was the mod invasive?
Uh, invasive enough in the sense they had to drill holes into the back. It's not really going back to normal. It's in—once you do it, you're done! I was keeping my fingers crossed.

Do you run your Boss RV-3 through that effects loop?
I do, yeah. I've had tons of rack gear and rack effects, but one day I just said, "You know what, I think I'm going to go back to the basics and just use some pedals." I got my Morley wah, I got my EQ and reverb, and the effects loop is so good in the Marshall. I used to have an EQ boost. I have my Maxon, my noise suppressor, my tuner, my Radial splitter into my 800 and Dual Rec, two different Marshall cabinets, one with Greenbacks and one with 75-watt Celestions. On the record, I used an 800 with a JMP for rhythm, an 800 for solos, and the Boogie and a Fender Twin reverb for extracurricular stuff, I like to call it—some cleaner and more atmospheric things.

It's interesting that you prefer passive pickups to active ones.
Part of it is because of the dynamics of passive pickups. This leads to the same reason I love Marshalls. I love to be able to push

ERIC RUTAN'S GEAR

GUITARS

- '91 Gibson Explorer with Gibson Dirty Fingers in bridge and Bill Lawrence L-500 in neck slot (C♯ tuning)
- '91 Ibanez UV7PWH Universe with Gibson Dirty Fingers and Bill Lawrence L-500 (G♯ tuning)
- Early 2000s B.C. Rich USA Custom Ironbird (C♯ tuning)

AMPS

- Marshall JCM800 '97 reissue
- Marshall JCM800 '97 reissue modded with Metropoulos Zero Loss FX loop kit
- Marshall '79 JMP
- Mesa/Boogie Dual Rectifier
- Fender Twin Reverb
- Marshall Classic Straight 4x12 (Celestion Greenbacks)
- Marshall 1960 Straight 4x12 Cabinet (75-watt Celestions)

EFFECTS

- Maxon OD808
- Maxon ST-9 Pro+ Super Tube distortion
- Maxon OD-9 Pro+ Overdrive
- Morley Steve Vai Bad Horsie wah
- Boss NS-2 Noise Suppressor
- Boss TU-2 Tuner
- Radial splitter
- Boss RV-3 Digital Reverb/Delay

STRINGS & PICKS

- D'Addario NYXL (.011–.056 and .011–.068)
- Jazz III Black Tortex 1.35 mm

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Photo by Alex Morgan

Rutan used a '91 Ibanez Universe and a '91 Gibson Explorer to track Hate Eternal's new album. Morbid Angel's Trey Azagthoth gave the Universe to Rutan for his birthday in 1993, and it's still one of Rutan's go-to guitars.

it and back off it. I've gone through an array of different pickups. Right now I'm actually using Gibson Dirty Fingers in the bridge.

You were previously using Seymour Duncan Customs in the bridge?
I was, but I tracked the new album with my Ibanez Universe and my '91 Gibson Explorer from the Morbid days. It just sounds ridiculous, with the mahogany body. It's really one of my favorite guitars, rhythm-wise. The Gibson Dirty Fingers sound amazing there. For solos, I've been using the Bill Lawrence L-500s for a long, long time now. Dimebag used those back in the day, and his solo tone was legendary.

It sounds like you're tuned down to G♯ on songs like "For Whom We Have Lost." Is that the Ibanez Universe?
Yeah. That guitar has a real neat history. It was Trey [Azagthoth] from Morbid Angel's guitar. He wrote *Covenant* with it, and he gave it to me for my birthday in '93. He could see I'd bought a couple of Universes, and I needed one for touring. I wrote some songs for *Domination* on it, so I've toured with it for two records. It's an original white Universe, and I think they only made 800, so it's special.

For years, I've wanted to implement that tuning, but nothing came naturally to me. I don't force anything, but for this record I just started messing with it. I was playing with it for, like, two months, but nothing was coming so I was thinking, "Maybe it's not in the cards." Then one day I was writing, and the next thing I knew, I wrote three songs with it: "For Whom We Have Lost," "Nothingness of Being," and "Upon Desolate Sands." They added such a neat texture to the album, and live those songs have gone over so well.

Do you get into a different headspace when you're producing?
When I'm producing, I'm really narrow-minded. When I'm working on an album I'm not thinking about creativity, as a musician. My life stops at that point and I'm focused on the band I'm producing. You know, bands like Cannibal Corpse are very prepared. I'll throw out ideas and melodies but that doesn't mean it always passes.

YOUTUBE IT

Captured live at the Senate in Columbia, South Carolina, on November 2, 2018, here's the first show of Hate Eternal's tour in support of *Upon Desolate Sands*. This full-length concert shows Erik Rutan in top form, armed with his trusty, red B.C. Rich Ironbird.

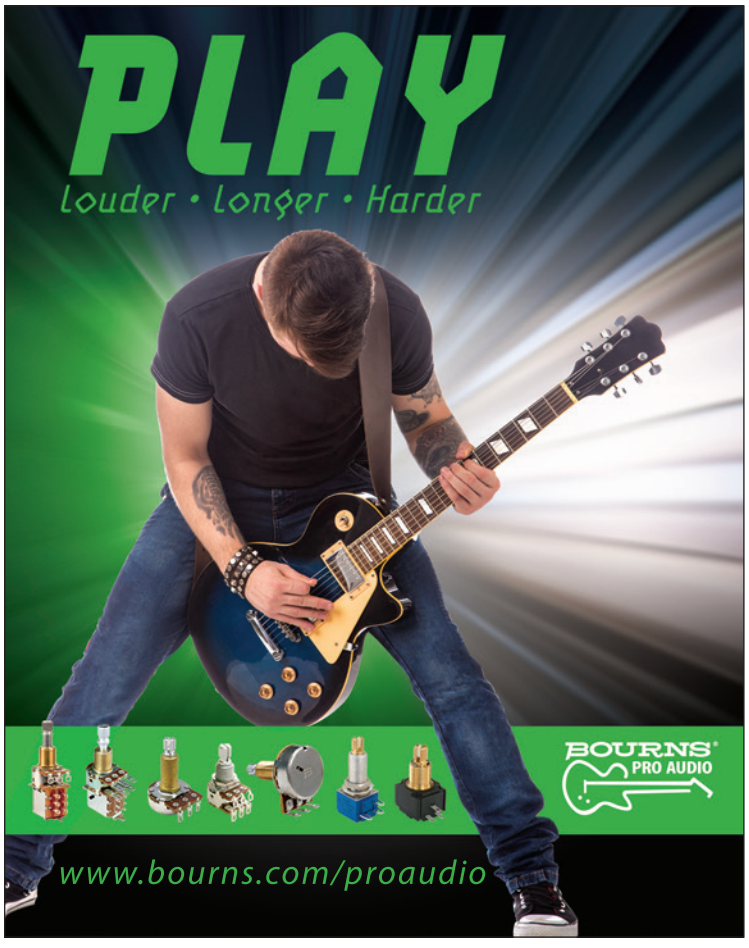
YouTube search term: Hate Eternal Live @ The Senate Columbia, SC 11/2/18 Full Set

If someone doesn't go for an idea that you really believe in, do you fight for it or just move on?

I'll fight for it. But by the same token, my whole focus on producing, really, is trying to bring out the authenticity of the band and the sound of the band. I really focus on trying to get the best performance I can, and that's because I come from an older time. I grew up recording analog, and now we're in a digital/analog world. So I'm always focused on trying to capture the most authentic tones and the best performances that I can get, and I push them to get that. But at the end of the day, I work for the band, first and foremost, and I want to make them happy. People ask sometimes, "Do you have a sound?" And I say, "My sound is bringing out the sound of the band." I've been fortunate enough to work with everyone from Cannibal Corpse to Agnostic Front to Madball to Mountain Goats. So I've had variants of different styles of music. They're all very unique, so I focus on bringing out their uniqueness.

You've spoken often about having a troubled childhood, yet you've been called the "nicest guy in death metal." Does music help you deal with negative emotions?

My childhood was very challenging. I faced a lot of adversity to get where I'm at. Music really saved me in so many ways, because, before music, I was in trouble in every which way—whether it was with school, or altercations, or legal troubles, even, as a juvenile. When you grow up with an aggressive nature because of surroundings in your family and things ... music gave me a way to express that. When I first started playing guitar, I just loved heavy aggressive music. Take all of this and put it into that. And it's made



me much happier. It's been therapeutic, and not just with anger or rage, but sadness and grief. Like, "For Whom We Have Lost" was written about two massively important people in my life that passed away last year.

"For Whom We Have Lost" has no vocals. Did you feel that the music alone could express your sentiment better than words in that case?
It was all heart, all soul. The interesting thing about that song is the main solo passage that goes from beginning to the end, and even the solo in the middle of the song, was all done in one evening of grieving. It was my way of expressing that grief, and the solo is one take. I kept it and I didn't even try to redo it. I first recorded it at home a few nights after one of these losses. The rest of the song came around another significant loss in my family. So it came at two different times and merged into one song, and has a lot of deep meaning to me.

It's a powerful way to end the album.
It is. For me, music has always been the one way I could express myself when I didn't know how. I wasn't given the tools in my youth to express myself. Music also has helped me in my everyday life to become a healthier, more positive person by expressing all this negativity in my music. I've been doing this for 30 years, and a couple of years ago I had my first *Guitar World* feature, and it was so special. Just like to be in *Premier Guitar*. For me, it's one of the most amazing accolades I could ever get as some kid that was 15 jamming to Black Sabbath.

I have pretty lofty goals. People would tell me, "You're kidding yourself. Get a real job, you're living a pipe dream." But I never doubted myself. I just focused on the task at hand, and that was because of personal need to have something to grasp onto, to focus on, to get me out of the s that I felt like I was totally submerged in. To be able to sing and play guitar in my own band, to record my own record, and this tour—touring with Cannibal Corpse, who I've produced four albums with, and to play with Hate Eternal, with our new record out.... This is one of the best times in my whole life. I've got a lot to smile about.

The Shape of Things

BY BRYAN GALLOUP

BRYAN GALLOUP *is an industry leader in the preservation of vintage and contemporary fretted musical instruments. Galloup Guitars is a full-service guitar facility producing Bryan's line of fine stringed instruments and is also home to the prestigious Galloup School of Guitar Building and Repair. Bryan is recognized as an expert in guitar-tone development. His Galloup Instrument Making System™, Wood Management™, and Sound Profiling™ software is changing the way the industry views guitar acoustics and design.*

Top right: *When comparing a Guidry SG-2 (left) to a 1941 Martin 000-18, one can see the inherent similarities of smaller shoulders and a tight waist—a format common with most fingerstyle guitars made today.*

Bottom right: *The Guidry (left) shows deeper sides and a wider bout when compared to the Martin, which is a common design many modern boutique fingerstyle guitar makers use to boost low-end frequencies.*

In my previous column ["The Name Game," December 2018], we talked about tonewoods and how they might affect both the sound and longevity of an instrument. I also stressed the importance of understanding their material qualities, to help avoid the hype generally associated with tonewoods. We will definitely be revisiting these topics, but we should first look at how body sizes and their resonances affect the sound of an instrument. Once you have a better idea of what you are dealing with, you can make better choices to suit your playing style.

Guitarists often find themselves attracted to certain body sizes because they seem to fit their playing style. This isn't just coincidence. Body size and shape play a role in the sound of an instrument by affecting its *resonant frequencies*. And a guitar's resonant frequencies act somewhat like a notch filter that boosts output in the frequency range in which they are active.

The guitar has three main low-frequency resonances: the air resonance, the top resonance, and the back resonance. Large, deep-bodied guitars put the emphasis on the lower end. Smaller, shallower guitars have less low-end response, which makes their lows tighter and more defined. This *doesn't* mean the smaller guitars have less volume. They are in fact the same volume within their resonant range, but just can't pump the bottom.

Body sizes are commonly referred to in terms used by well-known instruments, like the Martin dreadnought and OM (orchestra model), or, for you Gibson lovers, it's the Jumbo and L-00. When looking for low-resonance body styles or instruments with a big bottom, people are generally drawn to guitars in the vein of Martin dreadnoughts or Gibson Jumbos. Yes, larger guitars have been made, but these two models define what players prefer for that big, acoustic sound. In the case of the dreadnought, its 15.75" bout and deep sides lower the air resonance to around 95 Hz, while the Gibson's full 16" bout can drop the resonance below 90 Hz for its classic boom. This is why some players like the Martin for its more-defined low end, while others prefer the Gibson for its smoother, lusher bottom.

Mid-resonant body styles such as the Martin OM and the Gibson L-00 are smaller in width and depth, resulting in higher resonant frequencies—with air resonances ranging between 100 Hz to 115 Hz. Their slightly higher resonances are preferred by fingerstyle players for excellent separation of notes and tonal balance. Even higher-resonance guitars—commonly known as parlor guitars—achieve air resonances ranging between 110 Hz to 125 Hz. While their bass response is limited, the clarity is unique and defined. No, a parlor guitar probably wouldn't be your *first* choice if you're limited to just one guitar, but many players have parlors in their collection to round out their sound.

On the other hand, the Gibson J-185, for example, is a model that bridges the gap between jumbos and OMs. Its shape is the same as a J-200, but it's sized down from 17" to 16" at the bout, which kind of makes it the J-200's little brother. Between the Martin OM and the Gibson J-185, these two models inspired the modern fingerstyle boutique market. For one example, our senior builder Sam Guidry pulled inspiration from both models in designing his SG-2 guitar. When it's viewed next to a Martin 000-18 [**Photo 1**], one can see that even though the SG-2 model was designed deeper to lower the air resonance, the body styles have a similar footprint.

What seems to be true with all makers, big or small, is that while they might play around with the subtleties of the shape, in the end it's the air resonance that separates the classes between a jumbo, OM, and parlor. When you understand there are defined, measurable differences between body styles, it helps you appreciate why certain classes of guitar are so prominent, and why they have earned their place in the market.

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SERIES A

Nickel Attack

BY HEIKO HOEPFINGER

HEIKO HOEPFINGER *is a German physicist and long-time bassist, classical guitarist, and motorcycle enthusiast. His work on fuel cells for the European orbital glider Hermes led him to form BassLab (basslab.de)—a manufacturer of mono-coque guitars and basses.*

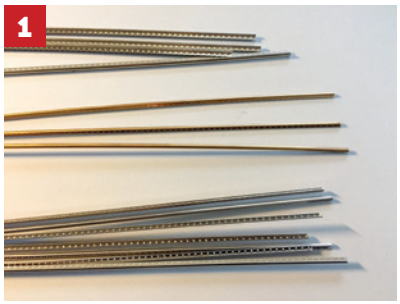

Photo 1: *You can distinguish fretwire by its color: Yellowish nickel-silver is on top, followed by Jescar's EVO Gold, and finally stainless steel.*

Photo 2: *Common metals in their elemental form. Notice the similarity between chrome (Cr) and nickel (Ni). Sometimes nickel surfaces—especially satin ones—are even sold as chrome*

When you've been building custom instruments for more than 20 years, it's easy to think you've seen it all, yet there are still some surprises. For example: A potential customer called to ask if I could build a nickel-free bass. Why? He has severe contact dermatitis, and most of his allergic reactions are triggered by touching nickel.

We all know such allergies exist, but as long as we're not affected, it's easy to ignore them. I'm not sure why it took 20 years for me to field such a request, because nickel allergy isn't rare. Several studies find that between eight and 16 percent of humans display allergic reactions when exposed to nickel.

There are several important factors that concern us as players: Nearly everything attached to a typical electric bass contains nickel, and we have significant contact with all these parts. This repeated contact often causes micro wounds that play a major role in sensitizing us to nickel, thus triggering allergic reactions.

Allergies can affect anyone at any age with any degree of severity, and once the immune system becomes sensitized to a substance and decides it has had enough of it, you're doomed. Also, nobody should feel safe: Studies have shown that the number of females affected by nickel allergy tripled once they got into jewelry, which means the amount of exposure matters. Skin symptoms can vary, but the old rock 'n' roll credo "play until your hands bleed" can actually have unintended consequences.

So how much effort would it take to create a nickel-free bass? Ridding an instrument of all nickel sounds relatively easy—stainless steel frets and strings, plastic knobs, and chrome hardware should do the job, right? Not so fast. We have two basic strategies: either replace a material that contains nickel or build a barrier to prevent direct contact. Let's drill down a bit.

Strings. This is what we touch the most, so it helps to switch to stainless-steel strings, instead of nickel-coated ones. Still, stainless steel is an alloy that often contains small amounts of nickel. Fortunately, nickel in stainless steel forms a non-ferromagnetic molecule, so the alloys used for strings most often contain only minimal amounts of nickel, if any.

Another solution is to use strings with non-metal coatings, such as a nylon wrap, but this surface gets easily damaged from playing, and when it does, the underlying metal becomes exposed. Here, tin or gold plating provides much better durability against wear. But remember, such plating is thin and soft, and thus still susceptible to deterioration.

Frets. Nickel-silver fretwire is the de facto industry standard. Again, stainless steel is an option, but it's often hard to get detailed info on exactly what kind of alloy is used in its production. One fretwire that claims to be 100-percent nickel-free is Jescar EVO Gold. It's made from a copper-based alloy, and also includes tin, iron, and titanium. Of course, if fretwire causes you problems, you could go fretless!

Bridge and saddles. Because most bridges are chrome-plated, you might assume they're safe, but two things make them potentially risky for those allergic to nickel. Almost all hardware gets a nickel plating before the final chrome is added, and you'd think that last chrome layer would form a safe barrier. Unfortunately, the chrome deposit is directly connected with the intermediate formation, and this ultimately creates a hydrogen chemical reaction that causes the chrome layer to shrink and exhibit tiny cracks. The only chrome plating without the nickel layer is done on stainless steel, and such hardware is rare.

Although chrome surfaces prove problematic in terms of nickel exposure, you can turn to brass, which is a mix of copper and zinc. Brass can come in several compositions, but only the "neusilber" formulation contains nickel. Other alternatives? A plain wooden bridge or a lacquered one with steel or titanium blades at the point of string contact.

Pickup covers, knobs, output jacks, plugs, strap pins, and tuning pegs. Everything we've discussed so far applies to all of these smaller parts, which we contact less frequently. Fortunately, these are relatively easy and cheap to replace. For instance, you can use plastic pickup covers, plastic or ebony tuner buttons, and lacquered output jacks, as well as brass strap buttons. Oh—don't overlook the screws.

To summarize: Yes, it's possible to make a 100-percent nickel-free instrument, but it's tricky because nickel is so ubiquitous. Imagine the challenge of avoiding it in all of your daily life!

Photo 1: Courtesy of basslab.de **Photo 2:** Courtesy of wikimedia.org

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Managing Less-Than-Magical Bandmates

BY VICTOR BRODÉN

VICTOR BRODÉN
is a Nashville bassist and producer who has toured and recorded with more than 25 major-label artists, including LeAnn Rimes, Richard Marx, Casting Crowns, and Randy Houser. His credits also include Grammy-winning albums and numerous television specials on CMT and GAC, as well as performances on The Tonight Show *and* The Ellen DeGeneres Show. *You can reach him at vbroden@yahoo.com.*

As evidenced during PG's Rig Rundown with AC/DC, Malcom Young's huge, revered rhythm tone was achieved with little to no bass dialed in on his Marshalls.

Being a musician requires an interesting balance of being on top of your game, while at the same time making sure you're in an environment where you are in a little over your head. The perfect performance environment—where you are inspired and surrounded by all the elements that facilitate greatness—can be a rare occurrence, but it's our responsibility to seek out such an environment as often as possible. When we surround ourselves with musicians we consider to be better players than us, we're in an environment where growth, unbelievable musical moments, and memories can happen.

As bassists, our end of the bargain is making sure our fellow musicians have a great experience playing music with *us*, which is determined by a multitude of factors, such as being prepared, playing the right equipment, and EQing our tone to fit the sonic makeup of the band. There's also looking around and interacting with our fellow musicians and the audience, dressing the part, and making sure no distractions enter our mind during the show. We truly need to be fully present.

Staying humble and realizing you're always learning is necessary to be a successful musician in any accompanying role. That said, we are sometimes surrounded by players who are not maintaining the standard of preparation and execution we are used to, which can land us bassists in situations where diplomacy and patience come into play in a major way.

There are a few things less-experienced players do that can severely impair my good time playing bass. I initially didn't know how to handle such situations, but after receiving some tough love over the years from older, more-seasoned players, I now have a feeling of responsibility to help less-experienced players, which simultaneously helps me have a better time playing.

The pet peeves following are somewhat bassist-centric, but as bassists, we hear and experience them closer than other musicians. Thankfully, simple adjustments can be made to ensure a big difference in the sound of a band in a short period of time.

The keyboardist's left hand. The joys of having a keyboard player in the band are many, so being aware of common problems can be a great asset to you as a bassist. If you are playing songs your keyboardist has played solo or in a duo a few hundred times, you may have to ask him or her to lay off the left hand completely to break the muscle memory of playing bass. In most cases, not using the left hand is better than an overplayed or poorly performed left-hand part.

When soundchecking over a large PA system, I always hit a few low notes between songs to feel if the stage is vibrating, and then ask the keyboard player to hit a few low notes as well. If the keyboard shakes the stage at the same level (or more) than the electric bass, then I know for sure the front-of-house mix is a muddy mess. Asking the FOH engineer for some EQing or to use high-pass filters on the keyboards is a good and easy solution.

The guitar amp. Guitarists are sometimes guilty of bringing too much firepower to a gig (just as bassists are). At least low-enders can justify it somewhat, since we need more size and wattage to move the same amount of air. Unless the gig is heavy metal or classic rock, I'm *always* concerned when I see the guitarist bringing in a 4x12 cabinet, or even a 2x12 closed-back cabinet. A guitarist using too much gain or distortion for a song also makes the low-end territory of the mix quite tricky to navigate, because the amount of low end that has to be EQ'd out of the guitar amp can be severe. I often remind guitarists who claim the late Malcolm Young had their favorite guitar tone that Young cut *all* the low end on his Marshall amps and used very little distortion. Not all guitarists realize that cutting low end and using less gain can make them sound punchier and be more aggressive in the mix.

The kick drum. Unless you are playing jazz, where the kick drum is often used as an accent tool, the kick drum is usually the anchor holding the musical ship together when paired with a simple bass-guitar pattern. A less-experienced or overly excited drummer will sometimes use his or her feet to improvise during straight-ahead pop or rock songs. This is a real groove killer. Whenever I notice this happening, I'll ask the drummer what patterns he or she has written down for different sections, and to double-check they are the same as what I have notated. I'll then say, "Cool, let's stick to that," while hoping no egos have been hurt. In my opinion, the solidity of a groove can be ruined by a drummer with a "wandering foot" quicker than almost anything else.

Bassists are used to providing a foundation for everyone *else* to sound great. However, there is no shame in asking our fellow musicians to make adjustments in their performances and tones to help us sound great, too.

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The Subversive Guitarist: A State of Gliss

BY JOE GORE

JOE GORE *has recorded with Tom Waits, PJ Harvey, Tracy Chapman, Courtney Love, Marianne Faithfull, Les Claypool, Flea, DJ Shadow, John Cale, and many other artists. His music appears in many films and TV shows, plus an incriminating number of jingles. Joe has written several thousand articles about music and musicians and has contributed to many musical products, including Apple's Logic and GarageBand programs. In his spare time Joe produces the Joe Gore line of guitar effects and edits a geeky guitar blog (tonefiend.com).*

When we say a guitar solo sings, it's inevitably a compliment. There's just something emotionally satisfying about guitar playing with a vocal character. It's not just a matter of sustaining notes the way voices can. It's also about articulation—the phrasing, vibrato, hammer-ons, pull-offs, and slides we use to conjure the expression of the human voice.

With that in mind, let's look at a simple articulation technique we often take for granted: sliding between notes, also known as glissando, or gliss for short.

Glissandos Galore

Many of us incorporate glissandos into our single-note playing. (Or "glissandi," if you insist on the proper Italian plural.) But we tend to use the technique in predictable ways. We're likelier to employ it, for example, when moving between neck positions. Hey, if you need to jump from the 3rd fret to the 10th, why not keep your finger against the string while shifting, producing a glissando?

But great singers might slide into any note at any time, and from above, as well as from below. Let's see if we can cultivate a similar freedom via the same technique we used when we focused on vibrato. We'll apply glissandos in unfamiliar ways, including ones that will feel awkward at first. Remember: It's a *good* thing when a new exercise feels awkward. It means you're addressing a technical "blind spot" and escaping the trap of muscle-memory playing.

Shake Like Jello on a Plate

In fact, let's start with a YouTube clip I included in that vibrato lesson: Howlin' Wolf's "Shake for Me," with its stunning Hubert Sumlin solo.

Listen to the first four measures of the solo, beginning at 0:52, after Wolf sings, "I've got a

cool shakin' baby, shake like jello on a plate." It's a reckless, loose cannon solo that sounds a bit dangerous, like Wolf himself. I struggled when I first attempted this phrase many years ago. I was used to sliding up into a phrase, not up *out* of one. Also, the first smear begins on a downbeat and lands on an upbeat. That felt more natural to me than the second smear, which starts on the upbeat.

Now let's see if we can cop that shakin' jello feel!

The Soundtrack of Sexual Harassment

To loosen up your fretting hand and arm, try playing this two-note "wolf whistle" pattern. (Yes, young friends, for much of the 20th century it was socially acceptable for men to whistle at random women on the street.)

Click here for Ex. 1

It's the simplest of musical ideas: just two notes separated by a fourth. But you need precise articulation to mimic the whistle effect. The first note must be played staccato (short) while the second one is more sustained. You slide up to the first note quickly from five or so frets below. The approach to the second note is a little slower, and the slide down from that note is slower still.

Try it as notated and at different positions on the neck, keeping your fretting arm's shoulder, elbow, and wrist relaxed. For the best sustain, keep your fingertip pressed strongly into the fretboard. This might sting a bit, depending on your fret type and finger strength. The string should still be ringing when you reach the bottom of the last gliss.

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Texas-Size Slides

Next, let's try applying glissandos to a familiar melody: the old cowboy folk ballad "The Streets of Laredo." **Ex. 2** shows the basic melody. (Sometimes the rhythm is more complex, with dotted quarter-notes, but I kept it simple for exercise purposes.)

Click here for Ex. 2

In Ex. 2, I play each note dryly and evenly, with no sliding. But once you have the melody under your fingers, try adding slides systematically. Try these variations:

- Slide into the first note of each bar from several frets below, but don't slide into any other notes, as heard in **Ex. 3**.
- Slide into the second note of each bar from several frets below, but don't slide into anyother notes, as heard in **Ex. 4**.
- Slide into the third note of each bar from several frets below, but don't apply sliding to any other notes, as heard in **Ex. 5**.

There are no strict rules about fingering, but as a rule of thumb (sorry!) start each slide with the finger you'd normally use to play the target note. In Ex. 1, for example, that means sliding into the first note of measure 1 with your pinky, but sliding into the first note of measure 2 with your index finger.

Yes, these exercises feel and sound unnatural. But they force you to use slides more mindfully. After practicing these for a few minutes, try doing the same with other melodies, or just improvise random phrases, incorporating slides. I guarantee you'll apply the technique in new ways.

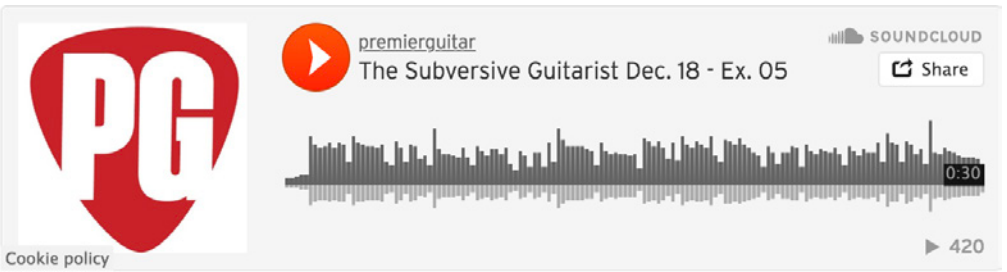
What Goes Up ...

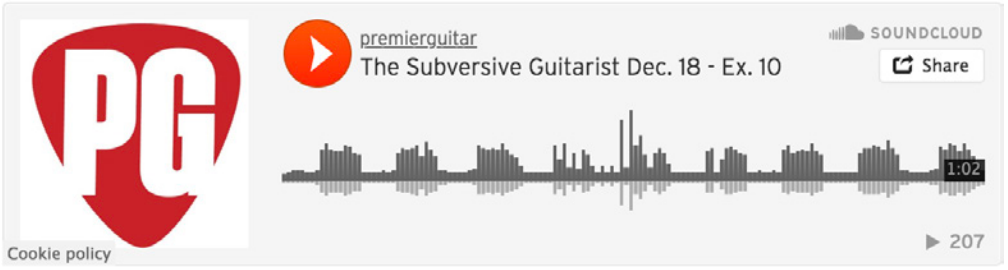
Next, repeat the last three exercises, but sliding *down* into the target note from a few frets above. **Ex. 6** is like Ex. 3, but with downward slides instead of upward ones.

Ex. 7 is like Ex. 4, but with downward slides.

Ex. 8 is like Ex. 5, but with downward slides.

Again, try picking out melodies and soloing a bit, using both upward and downward slides. Do you find your hands playing fresh things?





Infinite Shades of Blue

The goal here isn't to play with lots of glisses. It's having the control and flexibility to apply this articulation freely, regardless of beat or finger position. The slides in the above exercises sound stiff and artificial, but ironically, practicing them can help you apply the technique in loose, naturalistic ways.

With that in mind, let's try one last exercise. We'll start with a simple B.B. King-style blues lick in A (**Ex. 9**).

Click here for Ex.9

The basic melody has no sliding—just one bent note. But once you have the phrase under your fingers, try adding a slide to only the first note. And then only the second note. Then only the third. In **Ex. 10**, I play the phrase nine times, sliding into a different note each time.

After that, try playing sliding into the target notes from above.

None of these phrases sound particularly odd. They're just subtle variations on a single idea. It's such subtleties that can give your guitar playing the nuance and complexity of a good singer. Can they add anything meaningful to *your* playing?

Glissando vs. Portamento

Guitarists usually refer to the technique of striking a note, and then gliding the fretting finger to a new fret while the string sustains, as "sliding." A more technical term is glissando.

Another term you might hear is portamento, and some musicians use the words glissando and portamento interchangeably. There's a technical difference, however. If you play, say, a C note on a violin and then slide to the C an octave higher, you don't just sound each of the 12 half-steps along the way, but all the nooks and crannies between them. That's portamento. But if you drag your finger an octave from C to C on a piano, you produce each half-step, but not the frequencies that fall between them. That's glissando.

Guitarists play portamento when we bend strings or use a slide. But conventional finger-on-fret playing is strictly glissando.

Twang 101: Hank Garland's Nashville Jazz

BY LEVI CLAY

LEVI CLAY *is a London-based guitar player, teacher, and transcriber. His unique approach to learning keeps him in constant demand from students the world over, and his expertise as a transcriber has introduced his work to a whole new audience. For more information, check out leviclaycom.*

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- **Add jazz-style phrasing to your lines.**

Born in Cowpens, South Carolina, in 1930, Walter "Hank" Garland was one of the early pioneers of the sophisticated side of country guitar, often sounding like a jazz player who found himself playing with hillbillies.

Garland began young, inspired by the playing he heard on local radio stations. He worked hard learning to play and scored a gig with the Cotton Pickers at just 15, after a chance encounter in a guitar store with the group's leader, Paul Howard. Garland then moved to Nashville to pursue a career in music as a session player and artist. His signature tune, 1949's "Sugarfoot Rag," secured his reputation as an in-demand studio guitarist. His session credits include Elvis Presley's "Little Sister," Patsy Cline's "Let the Teardrops Fall," Little Jimmy Dickens' "I Got a Hole in My Pocket," and Bobby Helms' "Jingle Bell Rock." And *Move! The Guitar Artistry of Hank Garland* is a great collection displaying Hank's command as a leader.

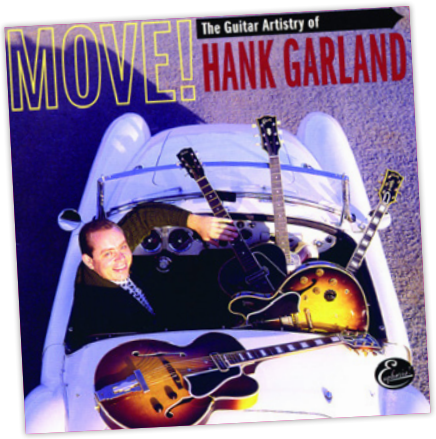
Garland was also a respected jazz guitarist, who played with legends like Charlie Parker and influenced the design of the Gibson Byrdland. In 1961, Hank was involved in a serious car accident that left him in a coma for a week. It's speculated that he suffered additional damage to his brain due to some of the medical treatments of the day, effectively ending his career.

Garland's playing is still a treasure trove of ideas—especially in a country setting, since his voice as a musician was so influenced by the jazz he grew up on. These outside influences add a twist on the genre not heard in the work of many of his peers. His playing has influenced many, but none have been more vocal than Chet Atkins, who regularly cited Garland as the greatest guitarist he ever heard.

Getting Garland's sound is really about a good neck humbucker and a punchy clean tone. I access that with the neck pickup on my Gibson Howard Roberts Fusion, with the tone rolled back to about 7.

Ex. 1 can be split into two sections. Taking place over an A major chord (A–C♯–E), an idea like this works great on a country-blues type jam. Beginning in the "G" shape of the CAGED system, the A note is played on the 3rd and 1st strings, with an ascending chromatic scale being played on the 2nd string. Note the repeated use of the ♭5 (E♭), which adds a bluesy edge to the lick.

> ***"Getting Garland's sound is really about a good neck humbucker and a punchy clean tone."***



The second part sits around the "E" shape, using a wide stretch on the 1st string to reach from the root (A) to the 4 (D), and then sliding down a half-step to the 3. It would be possible to see this entire lick as being in A Mixolydian (A–B–C♯–D–E–F♯–G), but with a ♭5 for that bluesy sound.

Click here for Ex. 1

The next lick (**Ex. 2**) uses triads to create melodic interest. Measure 1 consists of an A triad in the "C" shape before moving down a whole-step to create a G triad (G–B–D). This is called an "arpeggio substitution," where you play an arpeggio over a different root. In the context of the A chord, G is the ♭7, B is the 9, and D is the 11. These notes aren't as strong, but they help to create some jazzy colors before resolving back to the A triad in the next bar.

Arpeggio substitutions can be written as slash chords, or as their implied harmony. G/A tells you that it's a G triad, over an A bass note. A11sus tells you it's a dominant 11 chord without the 3. While either works, G/A is a little more specific.

The real exercise here is the strict alternate picking, which Garland would have used to play an idea like this. This mechanical crosspicking of a single note on each string is incredibly tricky at speed. You'll need to spend a lot of time building this up. Start on a down, follow with an up, and repeat.

Click here for Ex. 2

Ex. 3 combines double-stops with alternate-picked single-note ideas. As the lick takes place over an A chord, the double-stop contains the 3 and 5 (C and E, respectively) approached from a half-step below. The melody in measure 2 actually looks a little more like the A Dorian scale (A–B–C–D–E–F♯–G). It's not the cleanest choice over an A chord, as the C in the scale clashes with the C♯ in the chord. The second half of the lick repeats the first measure, then moves down to the "G" shape and picks notes out of the A major pentatonic scale (A–B–C♯–E–F♯). Pay attention to the picking directions here, which operate under the principal of constant motion.

Click here for Ex. 3

The fourth lick (**Ex. 4**) begins in the lower register, using notes of the A major pentatonic scale in the open position and the "G" shape, ending with a slide up to the C♯ on the 3rd string.

The second part of the lick features another wider stretch, as you're playing four notes that span five frets on the 1st string. At this stage, the movement should make sense. You're adding a chromatic passing tone between the 2 (B) and 3 (C♯).

The last note requires that you slide up the neck to the 17th fret to play the root note (A). This can feel difficult at first, but generally it's because you're looking at where your hand is, rather than where it's going. The solution is to be looking at the 17th fret as early as possible. I'm looking at it as I do the hammer-on and pull-off in measure 3.

Click here for Ex. 4

Ex. 5 uses the A major scale (A–B–C♯–D–E–F♯–G♯) on the 1st string, moving down with some fast

hammer-ons and pull-offs. Pick the first two notes with a downstroke and an upstroke, and then re-pick the first note before hammering and pulling to the second. This is then repeated starting on each note of the scale as you descend the neck. Use the first and second fingers for notes that are a fret apart, and the first and third for two-fret gaps.

The beauty of this type of lick is that it can be adapted to fit any scale in any key, as long as you know the notes of the scale.

Click here for Ex. 5

Ex. 6 combines a four-note descending pattern using the A major scale, then ending with an A major triad. This focus on the actual chord you're playing over helps to give your lines a sense of sophistication.

Click here for Ex. 6

The next lick (**Ex. 7**) begins with an ascending A major triad idea with an added C (♭3) for that country/blues twist.

The final two measures feature another descending four-note sequence, but this time using A Mixolydian. There's only one note different in this scale (G), but it makes a big difference to the overall sound, with a natural 7 implying a major 7 chord, and the flat 7 implying a dominant 7 chord.

Click here for Ex. 7

The final lick in this column (**Ex. 8**) uses a combination of notes from the major pentatonic and the C (♭3) from the minor pentatonic.

The focus here is the position shifting, along with the relentless alternate picking. Take your time and focus on how this line fits around an A major chord. It even ends by playing one!

Click here for Ex. 8

I can't stress this enough: Hank Garland is one of guitar's forgotten icons, so go and listen to his work and find the licks and tricks you like the most, work them out, and use them in your playing as fast as possible!

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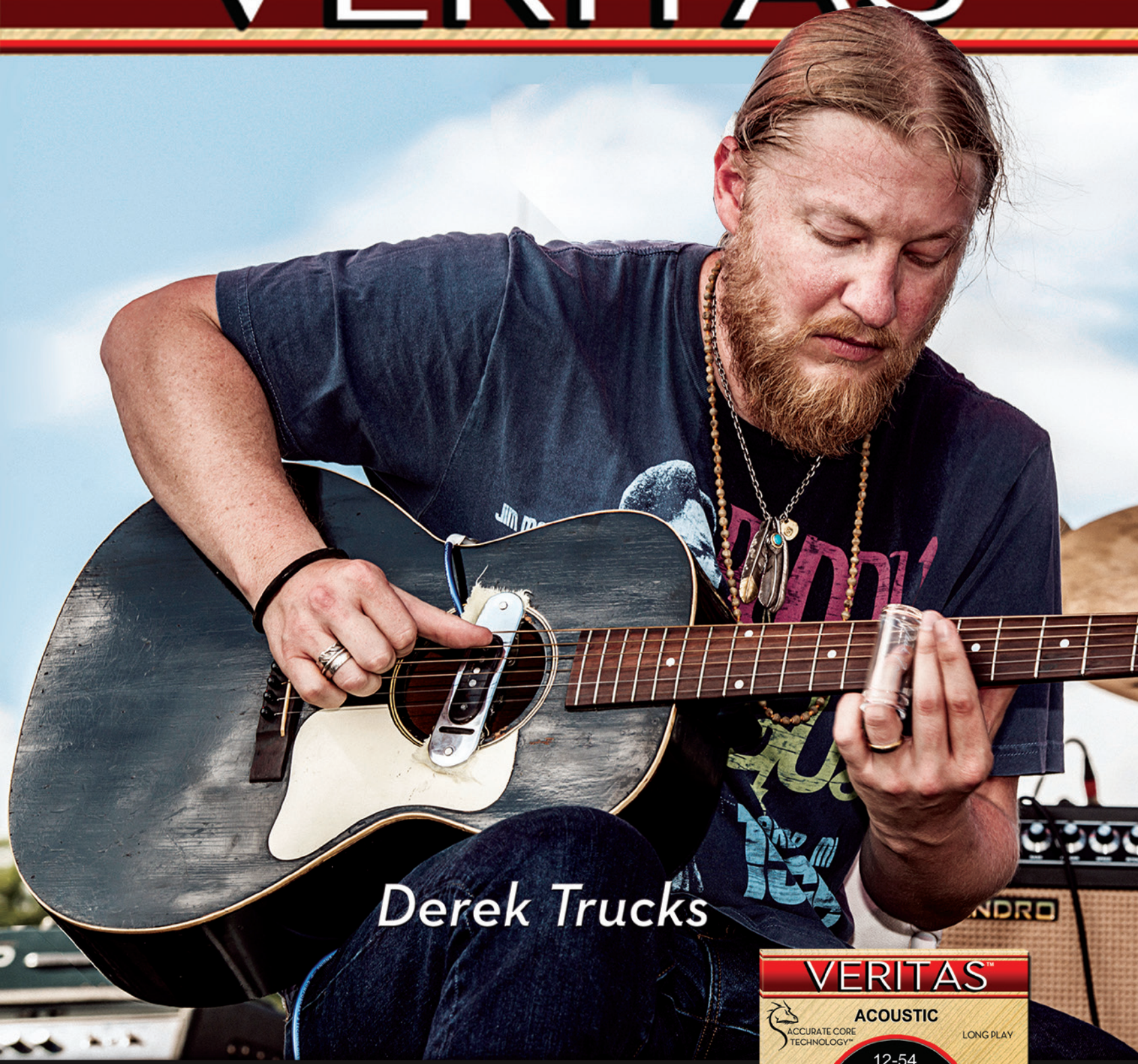

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The Subversive Guitarist: Learning to Love Flat Keys

BY JOE GORE

JOE GORE *has recorded with Tom Waits, PJ Harvey, Tracy Chapman, Courtney Love, Marianne Faithfull, Les Claypool, Flea, DJ Shadow, John Cale, and many other artists. His music appears in many films and TV shows, plus an incriminating number of jingles. Joe has written several thousand articles about music and musicians and has contributed to many musical products, including Apple's Logic and GarageBand programs. In his spare time Joe produces the Joe Gore line of guitar effects and edits a geeky guitar blog (tonefiend.com).*

Many guitarists hate to play in flat keys. But it doesn't have to be that way.

Yeah, basic chords tend to be easier in sharp keys than in flat ones, but there's more to the issue than laziness. In sharp keys, more open strings coincide with scale degrees, making possible rich-sounding chords that combine open and fretted notes. In the keys of C, G, and D (and their relative minors, A minor, E minor, and B minor) all six open strings correspond to diatonic scale degrees. Notice how often open-string notes (indicated in bold) match scale degrees in these keys:

- C major and A minor (no sharps or flats): C–D–E–F–G–A–B
- G major and E minor (one sharp): G–A–B–C–D–E–F♯
- D major and Bm (two sharps): D–E–F♯–G–A–B–C♯
- A major and F♯m (three sharps): A–B–C♯–D–E–F♯–G♯
- E major and C♯m (four sharps): E–F♯–G♯–A–B–C♯–D♯
- B major and G♯m (five sharps): B–C♯–D♯–E–F♯–G♯–A♯

The more sharps, the fewer diatonic open strings. But even in the five-sharp keys of B major and G♯ minor, you can often let the open 1st and 2nd strings chime out.

Compare that to flat keys:

- F major and D minor (one flat): F–G–A–B♭–C–D–E
- B♭ major and G minor (two flats): B♭–C–D–E♭–F–G–A
- E♭ major and C minor (three flats): E♭–F–G–A♭–B♭–C–D
- A♭ major and F minor (four flats): A♭–B♭–C–D♭–E♭–F–G
- D♭ major and B♭ minor (five flats): D♭–E♭–F–G♭–A♭–B♭–C

As you can see, there are fewer opportunities to integrate open strings, assuming you avoid relatively dissonant chromatic notes. But if you're reading this column, chances are you *like* chromatic dissonance. And that's where we're going this month.

Horns Vs. Guitars

Rock guitarists exploring jazz for the first time often run into this issue because many wind instruments favor flat keys by design. For instruments in B♭ (including trumpet, soprano sax, tenor sax, and clarinet) and E♭ (alto sax and baritone sax) the flat keys are comfy while sharp keys are relatively awkward. You can go to a hundred jam sessions, and you probably won't meet anyone who wants to play "All the Things You Are" in guitar-friendly G major/E minor rather than the traditional A♭ major.

In most pre-1970 jazz, guitarists dealt with flat keys by avoiding open strings, cultivating a piano-like style that makes every key equally approachable. But hey—many of us love the sound of open strings precisely because it contrasts so dramatically with the sound of fretted strings.

Jazz Shmazz

It doesn't matter whether you play jazz—if you like unexpected notes, you can apply flat-key chromaticism to any musical situation (except ones where you'll lose the gig if you play outside the box).

Check out **Ex. 1**, a simple chordal riff using a IV-I progression in the one-flat key of F. (You might also hear this as a I-V progression in the two-flat key of B♭.)

Click here for Ex. 1

Note that I've given the simplest possible chord symbols. The first chord in Ex. 1 is called a B♭ and not, say, a B♭♯4♭9. If you think of the chromatic dissonances as passing notes that resolve to simple chord tones, rather than as complex chords in their own right, it becomes easier to experiment with unconventional harmonies.

The open 2nd string—which translates to a ♯4 (B) scale degree—doesn't fall within the F major scale, but its crunch sounds cool leading into the C.

Let's push the envelope. **Ex. 2** is in B♭. It uses the open 3rd, 2nd, and 1st strings. The open G note falls within the key. B natural does not—it's a ♭2, a crunchy but useful dissonance covered in a previous lesson. The open E is a ♯4, equivalent to the open E in Ex. 1. In measures 5 and 6, it's at the center of a thorny chromatic cluster (D♯, E, F).

Click here for Ex. 2

Sometimes the ♭2 can sound vaguely Spanish, like the F natural in all those open-E faux-flamenco licks that sound impressive to non-guitarists. **Ex. 3** is in the same spirit—it's easy to play quickly and sounds trickier than it is. Here, though, we're in E♭.

Click here for Ex. 3

The open B is the ♭6, which gives the lick an ambiguous major/minor flavor. The open1st string is our ♭2.

Rag Mama Rag

Ex. 4 is interesting because it doesn't sound particularly "outside." It's typical fingerpicked ragtime/blues—but in the untypical key of A♭. Here, the open B is a ♯9 (or ♭3) leading to C, the 3 in A♭ major. Measures 5 and 6 are similar to the corresponding measures in Ex. 2, only here the open 1st string is a ♭6.

Click here for Ex. 4

E♭ major and E♭ minor can be sucky guitar keys because the lowest root note is nearly an octave above the open 6th string. **Ex. 5** addresses the issue with the 6th string tuned down to D. That way, you can barre across the three lowest strings at the 1st fret while adding open-string chromaticism.

Click here for Ex. 5

This example is in E♭ minor—a key with six frickin' flats! But one of those notes is C♭. (It's called C♭ rather than B natural because the scale already includes a B♭, and the C♭ is the 6th scale degree. But however you spell it, the open 2nd string provides it.) Meanwhile, the open 1st string is another ♭2.

Hidden Opportunities

Flat keys aren't an occasionally necessary evil for guitarists—they're an opportunity! They can break you out of the muscle-memory box while generating fresh-sounding, harmonically compelling ideas. Try it and see—and please share your discoveries!

Fretboard Workshop: Soloing with Triads

BY SAM BELL

SAM BELL *began playing guitar at age 4, and since then has explored everything from funky blues to screaming metal on an 8-string. A member of tech metal band Mask of Judas, he is also currently writing his own solo instrumental album. For more information, visit sambellguitar.com.*

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LESSON OVERVIEW

- Build intriguing lines that outline the changes.
- Use 16th-notes to create syncopated subdivisions.
- Combine odd groupings to heighten rhythmic interest.

Let's take a look at building cool lines using root-position diatonic triads taken from the major scale. What is a triad? A triad is built by stacking three alternating notes from a scale. For example, if we take a G major scale (G–A–B–C–D–E–F♯) and build a triad on the root by skipping every other note we get G–B–D, a major triad. Another way to think of this is to stack a minor third (B–D) on top of a major third (G–B). If we extend this process throughout the scale, we end up with the following triads: G, Am, Bm, C, D, Em, and F♯°.

Because all these chords are diatonic to a single key, we can use them to create some interesting lines. Many rock and fusion guitarists who are inspired by saxophone players use this approach in their improvisations. Larry Carlton, Frank Gambale, and Steve Lukather are just a few of the notable 6-stringers who incorporate this approach into their phrasing.

When beginning to build lines with triads, many guitarists find that it can feel a bit dry and uninspiring. It's not the most classically "guitaristic" way of approaching the instrument, but it can lead to some incredibly melodic playing and faster lines that really pique the listener's ear. In this lesson, we'll explore ways to practice our scales to get more comfortable with triads. I'll also demonstrate techniques for building lines and then conclude with an improvised solo for you to check out.

The first six examples use notes from the G major scale. However, they're played over an Am7 chord to give us an A Dorian (A–B–C–D–E–F♯–G) flavor. In each audio example, the line is played up to speed and then at half the subdivision speed, so you can practice along. Take these ideas through each position of the major scale, both ascending and descending.

Here's the Am7 backing track I used for the first group of examples. Go ahead and download or stream it, so you can play along.

Photo by Lewis Ryan

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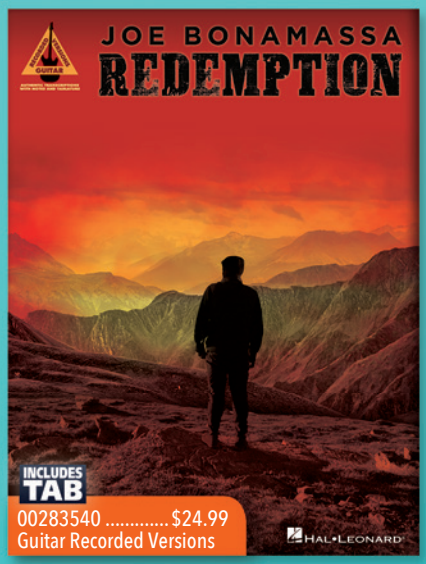

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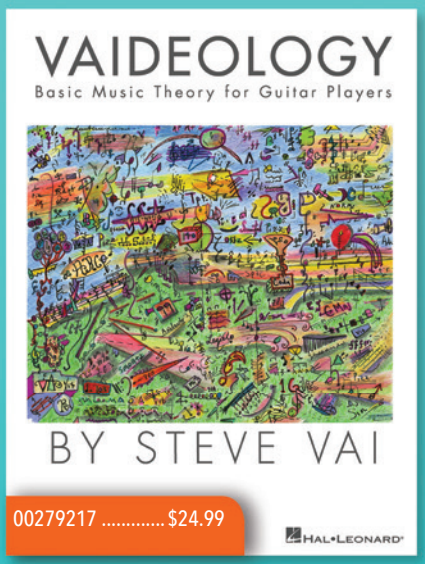

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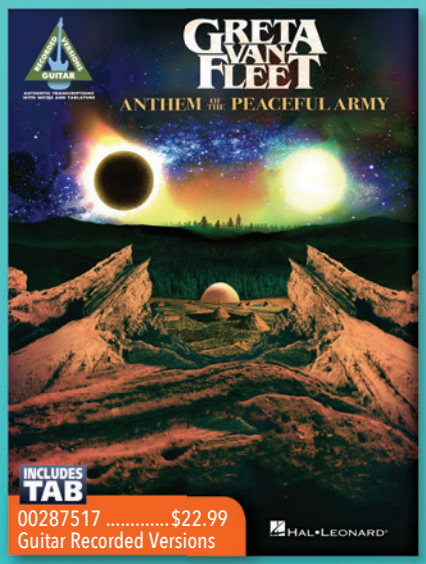

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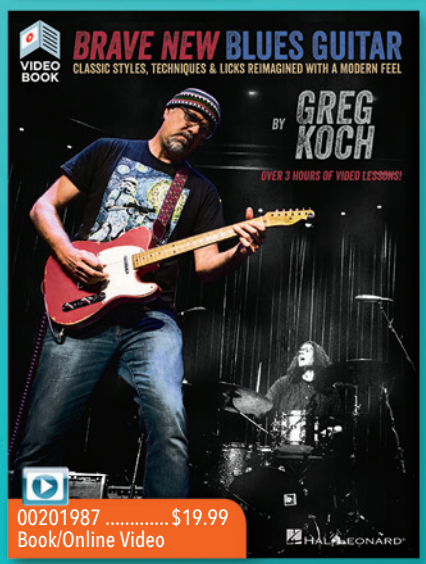

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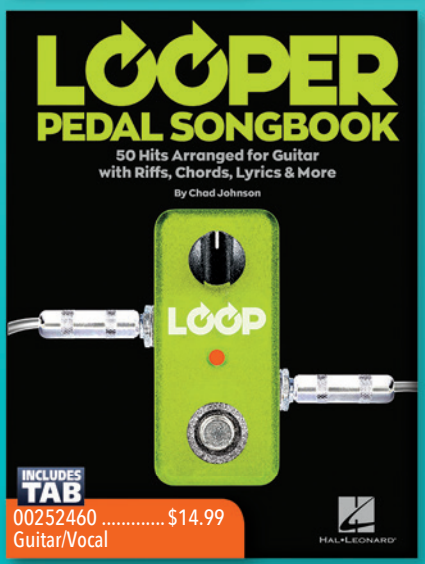

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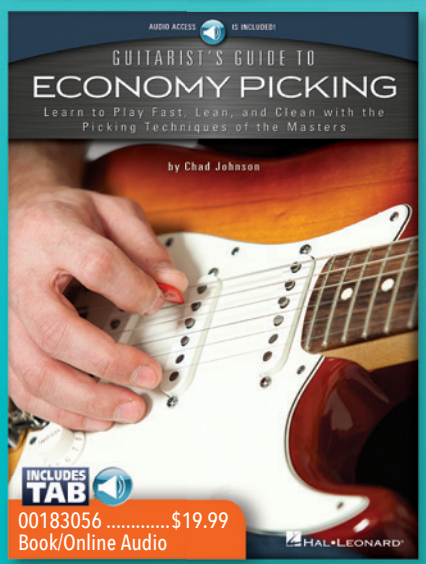

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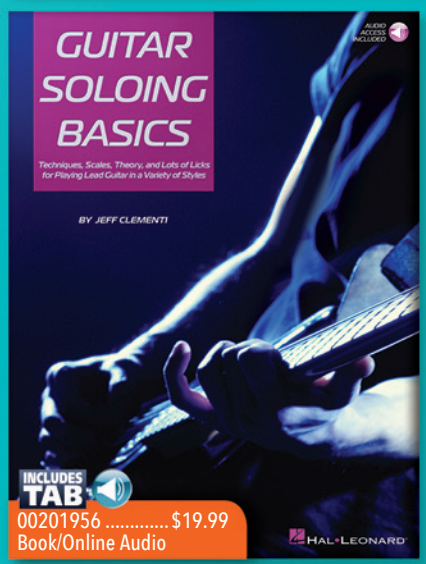

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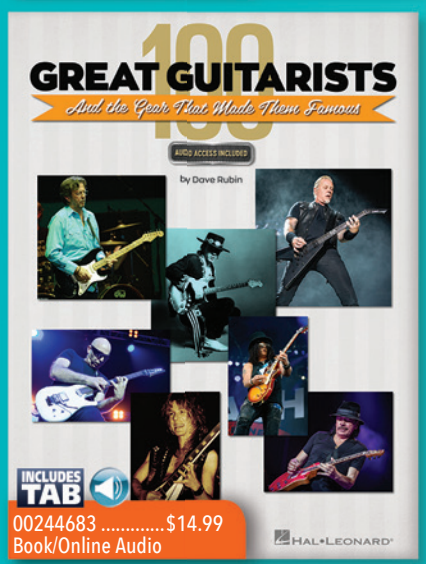

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> ***It's not the most classically "guitaristic" way of approaching the instrument, but it can lead to some incredibly melodic playing and faster lines that really pique the listener's ear."***

In **Ex. 1**, I'm playing diatonic triads up the scale in eighth-note triplets. You can use any articulation you wish (picking, legato, or hybrid picking). The goal isn't to attain speed, but a sense of musicality when playing through these examples.

Click here for Ex. 1

For **Ex. 2**, we're playing the triads "backwards," starting on the top note of each root position triad and descending with triplets.

Click here for Ex. 2

Ex. 3 showcases the classic zig-zag technique often used by saxophone players. Here, we ascend the first triad and then descend through the next triad. This sequence continues through the example. As an extra bit of practice, try starting with a descending triad into an ascending one at the start of the exercise.

Click here for Ex. 3

Now let's look at how to make these patterns sound compelling. **Ex. 4** showcases the use of straight 16th-notes, where each triad is played in groups of four. This way we can get more out of each triad before moving to the next one.

Click here for Ex. 4

In the next lick (**Ex. 5**), we take our 16th-notes and create some odd groupings. The five-note pattern is to ascend two notes in one triad and then ascend three notes of the next triad. By playing a five-note pattern in groups of four, we give the line a syncopated, rising feel.

Click here for Ex. 5

We're sticking with a five-note pattern for **Ex. 6**, but this time we are using a 1–3–5–1–3 pattern on each triad before moving on.

Click here for Ex. 6

Now that we've tackled some exercises to help get our fingers wrapped around the triads, let's put these ideas into a more musical context. **Ex. 7** is an eight-measure solo in the key of B minor. I won't break it down note-for-note, but I encourage you to analyze it and pick out the triads I used. As a bonus, I've included the backing track I played over, so you can develop your own melodic phrases based on these techniques. Dive in!

Click here for Ex. 7

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Deep Diving Into Treble-Bleed Networks

BY DIRK WACKER

DIRK WACKER *lives in Germany and has been a guitar addict since age 5. He's also a hardcore DIY-er for guitars, amps, and stompboxes and runs a website on the subject (singlecoil.com). When not working at his guitar workbench, he plays country, rockabilly, surf, and flamenco. Contact him at info@singlecoil.com.*

Passive single-coil pickup systems have an inherent sonic idiosyncrasy: When you turn down the volume—even just a bit—the high-end loss is not proportionate to the volume reduction. In other words, a small cut in volume creates a far greater drop in your guitar's treble response. This is true of the Stratocaster and Telecaster, as well as many other popular models, so I'm sure you're familiar with it.

This quirk of passive electronics isn't really a big deal for all players. Many aren't bothered by it because they've simply gotten used to the sound over the years. Others really like this "problem," since it lets you coax a second tonal color from the same pickup—simply roll back the volume a tad to fatten up the tone. But a lot of guitarists (myself included) prefer to maintain an identical amount of treble at any volume setting.

Using active electronics is the only real solution to combating the "volume-versus-tone" issue—all other strategies are just a compromise. That said, compromise can lead to significant improvements. Personally, I use a compromising solution in all of my own guitars. And my favorite solution is one of the easiest mods ever: add a "treble-bleed network" between the input and output of the volume pot(s) of the guitar. This works with passive single-coils and humbuckers, but if your guitar has more than one volume control, like on a Les Paul, each volume pot needs its own treble-bleed network.

Some background. So, what is a treble-bleed network and how does it work? In layman's terms, it's usually a combination of a small capacitor and a resistor in parallel. Techies call this a RC network, but such systems are also called a "treble bypass filter" or TBA, for treble-bypass arrangement. You can also find variations that use only a cap, or a resistor in series with the cap.

The theory behind this little rascal appears straightforward, but it's much more complicated than it seems. So as not to slam you with theory, I'll stick to the basics, which means having to over-simplify the following explanation.

First, the good news: It's possible to calculate the values for a treble-bleed network that will work superbly in a given guitar. The bad news? The formula behind it is complex and beyond the scope of this column. There are many parameters involved in this formula, such as the number, ratio, and resistance of the pots in your guitar, the pickups, the length and capacitance of your guitar cable, the input impedance of your amp, and more. All of these must be calculated in the context of a Fletcher-Munson curve, which defines equal-loudness contours for the human ear. Doable, but really complicated! Typically, you have to make several simulations and analyze the corresponding curve to see if it matches your goal. Such calculated networks will work wonderfully in the guitar you calculated them for, but when you change *one* of the parameters—like the length or type of your guitar cable, or you plug into a different amp—the treble-bleed network will stop working perfectly. That's an unavoidable fact. Because of all the parameters involved, it's easy to see why standard "one-size-fits-all" networks are an illusion.

So you can experiment to determine what you like best, based on your own gear and sonic goals, I'll describe the different types and possible value ranges of the components. Because the range of these components is very limited, at minimum you'll achieve good results. But if you want *great* results, it's important to realize you'll have to experiment with each individual guitar, and this includes a lot of component swapping.

The details. When you roll down the volume, the treble-bleed network starts to filter out some bass frequencies, making the highs more prominent. It won't *boost* anything (treble, in this case) because a passive device can only filter out certain frequencies. The networks are always connected between the input and output of the volume control, as shown in **Fig. 1**.

There are basically three different types of treble-bleed networks (**Fig. 2**), and we'll examine each of them. On the left is "cap only," which isn't a true network because it's a capacitor without a resistor. Fender made this version popular in the '60s when they started installing a 1000 pF cap on Telecaster volume controls. Together with the 1M pots they used at this time, the sonic result was kind of creepy ... thin and bright.

This value is still popular today in many one-size-fits-all solutions. This circuit has one problem: As the volume is turned lower, more of the higher frequencies will predominate—even to the point where the guitar starts to sound very "tinny" as

Fig. 1

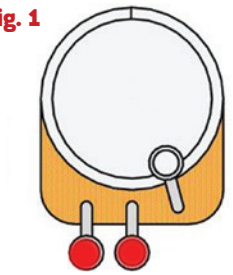
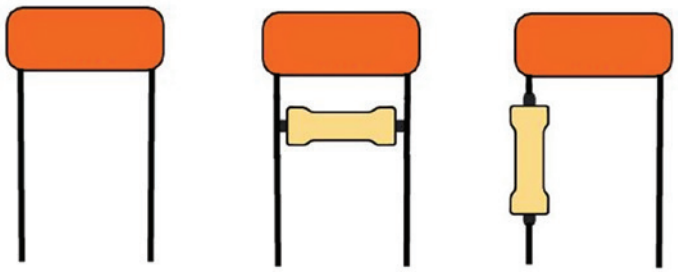


Fig. 2



the volume approaches zero. Depending on what you're after sonically, this can be a good thing or not. If you want to experiment with this cap-only configuration, good working values are from 220 pF up to 1500 pF.

Our second type of treble-bleed network is shown in the center of Fig. 2. This consists of a cap with a resistor in parallel. This is the version you'll find in most treble-bleed networks. A very popular combination is a 1000 pF cap with a 150k-ohm resistor in parallel. This works for almost any guitar, when it comes to a one-size-fits-all solution.

The cap-with-resistor-in-parallel version can be superior to the cap-only method because, as you turn the volume lower, the higher frequencies don't dominate. The problem with this circuit is that it affects the taper of the volume pot in a negative way when the two values are not carefully matched to each other. Good working values to try are from 220 pF up to 1500 pF for the cap, and 100k-ohm up to 330k-ohm for the resistor.

Our third treble-bleed network, shown on the right, consists of a cap with a resistor in series. This configuration became popular in the '90s when Australian luthier Chris Kinman started to use a 1200 pF cap and a 130k-ohm resistor in series for his guitars. This scheme is regarded by many to be the best of the three versions, because it seems to solve the problem of the volume pot taper and the tinny sound. Even Fender uses it now. Their system employs a 1000 pF cap and a 130k-ohm resistor, and is dubbed the Fender Tone Saver. Values you should try are 470 pF up to 1500 pF for the cap, and 100k-ohm up to 330k-ohm for the resistor.

Regarding the two components, here's a rule of thumb: Brightness is determined by the resistor's value (less ohms yields more highs), but the frequencies that are present are determined by the cap's value—the lower the value, the higher the frequencies, and conversely, the higher the value, the lower the frequencies.

Into the sound lab. To conduct your own treble-bleed network experiments, solder two wires to the input and output of the volume pot and connect alligator clips on the other ends. If you let the two wires hang out from under the pickguard for fast access, you can easily try every combination of cap and resistor. (Be sure to take notes.)

After you find your favorite combination, remove the two wires and permanently install it to the volume pot. Remember, what you choose may be very different from another player. Some like more high end (this is often due to a dark-sounding amp), while others prefer more midrange to get a punchy sound. It's worth taking the time to try several combinations. This simple circuit can turn a muddy-sounding guitar into an articulate one—even with tons of distortion—because the tone will clean up when you roll back the volume.

I can't advise you what to use—you need to explore this yourself or let an experienced tech calculate your personal treble-bleed network, based on your specific rig. Many guitarists like the cap-only version for Strats and Teles, while others prefer a cap and a resistor in parallel. The resistor-in-parallel and resistor-in-series schemes perform more-or-less equally, but the parallel version offers more highs when you turn down the volume. Again, this can be positive or negative, depending on your pickups and amp.

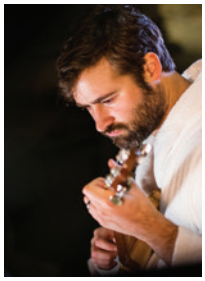
Okay, that's it for now. Until next time ... keep on modding!

"When you roll down the volume, the treble-bleed network starts to filter out some bass frequencies, making the highs more prominent."

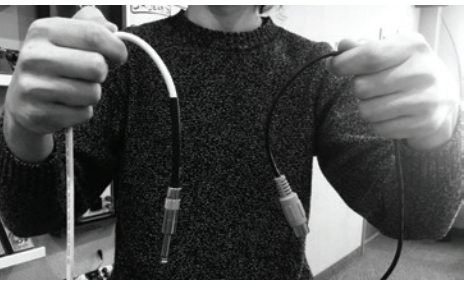
Schematics courtesy singlecoil.com

Let's Remember to Be Kind

BY JOEL KORTE



JOEL KORTE *is the owner of Chase Bliss Audio and the designer of its products. His goals in life are to be kind to people and be the best husband and father he's capable of being. Oh! And make weird pedals. He also really likes to travel.*



"How can I make this *go into* this*?"*

Well, it's been quite a year. This will be my last State of the Stomp column for the foreseeable future, so I wanted to write about something that felt especially important to me, and since I'm writing this on January 1, 2019, I'm particularly reflective. This topic came to mind a few weeks ago as I was perusing an effects pedal forum (as I'm *wont* to do), and I noticed a forum user taking considerable effort in trying to make another forum user feel bad about their limited gear knowledge. It instantly brought me back to what I consider to be a very formative experience for me, in my teens.

Let me preface the story I'm about to tell with a quick summary of where things currently stand for me. I've been in the effects pedal industry for more than a decade, and I spend a good deal of time on forums related to this industry. Part of my interest is to read honest feedback about my own pedals, part of it is that I like to have an idea of what is popular or noteworthy in the industry, and part of it is that I genuinely enjoy interacting with other gearheads. Usually when I take the time to contribute to a discussion, other users respond and really do seem to care about what I have to say. And here I am, writing an article in a popular guitar gear magazine. Needless to say, I've been very passionate about guitar-related matters for some time, and I continue to learn something new every day. This is probably obvious, but this was not the case when I was 15 years old. In fact, *everyone* who knows anything about *any* topic has a similar story. Whatever things you love, whatever things you care about, there was a time when you didn't know much about them. In short, I've been doing this for a while now, and I'm fortunate that some folks are interested in my musings.

Story time. I *think* I was 15, and I'd been playing guitar for about six months. I *really* started to get interested in recording. My interest in the technology of recording passed my interest in playing guitar fairly rapidly, as I recall (although it has since flipped back). Around this time, I procured a MIDI controller. I don't remember how I got it, but it may have been a garage-sale find. The problem was, I didn't know it was a MIDI controller. In fact, I had no concept of what MIDI was. I assumed it was some kind of synthesizer or piano, because it had keys on it. I looked all over for the audio connections to it, but all it had on it were MIDI and power jacks. It was a really tricky time for me to get information, as this was around 1999 and the internet was not ubiquitous yet. Further, I stutter (and have my entire life), but it was particularly debilitating back in those days. I *really* wanted to get this thing working, though. I was super-excited to try recording with something that wasn't a guitar.

I went to a big-box music store because I assumed there must be a cable that could change the MIDI cable into a 1/4" audio cable. I searched and searched on my own, because I didn't want to ask any of the employees and risk stuttering and embarrassing myself, but at some point, I realized that I needed to get some help from someone. I grabbed a 1/4" instrument cable and a MIDI cable. (I often tried to get some kind of visual example for situations like this, to assist my communication and augment my speaking.) I walked up to the guy in pro audio and held up the two cables, one in each hand, and said, "How can I make *this* go into *this*?" Of course, it wasn't that easy. With my stutter, it took a good 30 seconds to get that sentence out, and it felt horrible and embarrassing the entire time. After I finally managed to get the question out, I looked up at the guy and he said, "Are you serious?! MIDI is *information*; it's not audio!" He even threw in a chuckle.

For some reason, that was one of my worst memories of stuttering, ever. I cared *so* much about figuring out this problem, tried so hard to communicate, and felt completely humiliated and stupid. Things are different now, of course. It's taken a lot of work, but I hardly ever think about stuttering and I believe I'm an above-average communicator. I also know a thing or two about audio. It's important to remember that everyone is in a different place in his or her journey and search for knowledge. So, in 2019, let's remember to be kind.

REVERB

DELAY

MODULATION

INSPIRATION MACHINES

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strymon.

Amps, Pedals, and Pizza Delivery

BY STEVE CARR

STEVE CARR *is the mild-mannered, Midwestern-rooted leader of North Carolina-based Carr Amplifiers. A family man and hi-fi enthusiast with a growing Southern accent, he spins his varied job experiences—roofer, mental hospital orderly, waiter, plumber, cook, t-shirt printer, bicycle salesman, bar owner, and historical building renovator—into designing tube amps.*

Right: *Inspiration is delivered in all forms. In our columnist's tale, a basic Gibson, an Echoplex, and an Electro-Harmonix Memory Man all play a role.*

I don't know about you, but *I like pedals!* Everyone seems to have a favorite type, and mine are echoes. I have some friends who love all manner of fuzz pedals, others with 15 different overdrives or rotary flanges—but for me, it's delay. In the late '70s, I got my first pedal, which I bought used from an acquaintance/rival in another local band. It was an Electro-Harmonix Memory Man. Suddenly, early U2 and vintage Fripp secrets were revealed, and I was happy as a clam. (Hitting a lot of them, too!)

Back when I was dating my wife, she bought me an early-'70s solid-state Echoplex for my birthday. This was long enough ago—pre-internet—that Echoplexes were not the coveted gems they're considered today. I do miss the era of oddball music shops that were half junk shop and half music store. You might find a gem if you looked long enough. That's the type of store the Echoplex came from. It was run by a big bearded dude named Jim (sadly, R.I.P.) who drove around the region in an AMC Pacer—stuffed with funky '60s practice amps and guitar necks peeking through the bubble glass—trading and bringing oddities back to his Chapel Hill back-alley music store.

I first met Jim while delivering pizza. I was 24 and new to North Carolina's Southern charms. Imagine a dark and stormy night. I'm driving way out in the country searching for an address. I pull into a trailer park with a long gravel drive. There it is: the pizza's final destination. (Was that a banjo I heard in the wind?)

I knocked on the door and the big bearded man said, "set it right in there," pointing to his trailer's living area. After putting the pizza down, I looked up and scanned the room: vintage Les Pauls, Strats, Les Paul Jrs. (his favorite), and you-name-it lined the walls. There was gear everywhere. (But no banjos.) Just looking at this was the best tip I'd ever gotten! He was super friendly and I got to play a handful before remembering the other hot pizzas in the bag.

I guess my point is this: The internet is amazing and wonderful, but instant access and everyone knowing everything can be overrated. We need to all support our funky local music stores as often as we can. Get to know the staff and owner. Have real encounters with others. They are fanatics just like us!

When prototyping amps, we test new designs with all sorts of pedals to see how they react. This is important, because these days being a "great pedal platform" has become one of the main virtues amp buyers seek. Sure, your amp has to sound great clean or dirty—however you like your base tone—but when someone says "it takes pedals really well," that is essential praise. Conceptually, the thought of amps with tons of channels is appealing to me, but in practice (even with Carr Amps that channel switch) I tend to just stick with one glorious channel and have the pedals do the heavy lifting. That is my personal preference, and, from my perspective as an amp manufacturer, the rise and reacceptance of single-channel amps is the biggest trend I've witnessed in the past 15 years. I wonder if folks now think more of the guitar/amp as their basic tone unit, while wanting pedals to offer infinite variables and tweaks?

So, what makes an amp take pedals well? I believe clarity and high initial headroom have a lot to do with it. These qualities allow the flavor to come through, plus the preamp can then deal with complex signals from multiple effects without sounding congested. I've found that really high-quality filter capacitors in the preamp, in particular, opens up an amp—helping it remain dynamic when pressed. And to me, a high-quality power supply is where the juice lives!

Something that has worked very well for my tone and setup is using a clean boost pedal. I leave it on at all times, set to just give a mild bump, and it sounds good anywhere in the chain. Lately, I like using a clean boost as the last pedal on my board, right before the amp—like a pedalboard output supercharger. It really keeps the sound tight and punchy. This probably has something to do with their low-output impedance, which will drive a long cable without loss back to the amp. This is true especially if you're using a lot of other pedals at the same time. Give it a try and see what you think.

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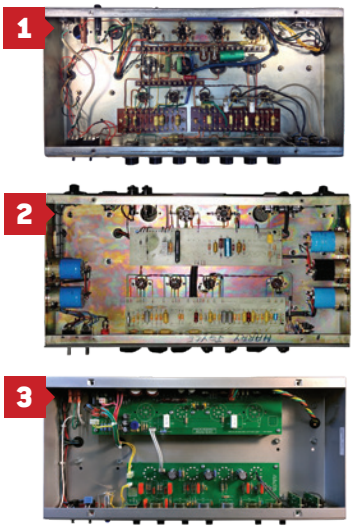
CELESTION

Are Handwired Amps Superior to PCB-Based Designs?

BY STEVEN FRYETTE

STEVEN FRYETTE *is one of the pioneers of multi-channel high-gain amps and tube power amps. He founded VHT Amplification, now Fryette Amplification, is a partner and design engineer in the relaunch of Sound City Amplification, and has played a key role in the design, development, and relaunch of Fane guitar speakers.*



*Evolution: In **Photo 1**, this 1966 Reeves-built turret board Sound City One Hundred is the forerunner of the iconic Hiwatt layout, while **Photo 2** captures a late-'70s Reeves-designed PCB Hiwatt DR103. Note the similarity to the component layout of the original Sound City One Hundred. **Photo 3** shows a current Sound City Master One Hundred using modern high-quality PCB materials to emulate the original One Hundred's layout.*

As long as I've been involved in tube amplifier design and engineering, there's been a debate about whether amplifiers with printed circuit boards (PCB) are superior, equal to, or inherently inferior to handwired amps. Buzzwords like "point-to-point" are somehow easier for many guitarists to spout than putting actual thought into the subject. No matter how expertly executed, PCB designs always seem held in less esteem than handwired amps—even terribly executed ones. Most reasonable players probably don't care how an amplifier is made, as long as it is reliable and sounds good. Or so I thought.

Recently, we posted before-and-after photos on Instagram of one of our amps that some field repair shop had butchered—the original wiring was horribly chopped and spliced back together. The post was intended to show a factory restore in progress, yet a follower complimented us on our cool handwiring, saying it "looks amazing." In my mind, this attitude reflects a narrative that the mere presence of wires somehow imparts special effort.

Many elements go into amplifier development, including rigorously vetted sonic research and testing. Let's say you want to compare the sonic properties of two different coupling capacitors. If you play an amp with capacitor A installed, and then switch to capacitor B and listen again, your results are going to be skewed by the time that passed during the swap. Perhaps there's been a change in line voltage, or the amp isn't positioned identically in the room. Also, if you know what part type you're switching to, you're going to be mentally predisposed to hear a different result. You might think that making two identical amps with these different capacitors installed would be a better solution, and you would be wrong. There are going to be more than enough tolerance differences between the two amps to make such a comparison impossible—especially if it's a handwired amp.

R&D on PCB amps is time-consuming and expensive. And for every PCB design, there is, or should be, a reason for that design and its execution to exist. If the engineer fails to observe essential design practice, odds are the product will be inadequate or it will fail. Copper traces that crack—a frequent criticism of PCB amps—are the result of poor mechanical design and cost cutting. When a poor design fails, PCB amps in general get a bad rap—not just the badly designed ones.

PCB layout and material selection in audio design are as much an art form as the circuit design. A well-engineered layout is informed by experience, trial and error, and an understanding of physics. The beauty of PCB design is that once it's completed, it's permanently locked in place. This makes for extremely consistent performance from unit to unit. However, that doesn't guarantee reliability. The only way to lock in reliability is through careful component selection and rigorous testing. The fine print here is that consistency and reliability do not automatically guarantee a great-sounding amp. That is a function of design intent: the vision that caused the design to exist in the first place. Some of the best-built amps in the industry have PCB-mounted pots and tube sockets. So do the least expensive ones, but for very different reasons. In most cases, the price of the product will indicate what to expect in the way of build quality, consistency, and long-term performance.

The idea that point-to-point equals sonic magic derives from components, pots, and tube sockets being individually wired, which inspires trust. The truth is, solder lugs and eyelet boards require greater amounts of solder and wire than on a PCB amp. Solder, a relatively poor conductor, is meant to help secure an already valid electrical connection. Solder lugs enable unreliable solder connections, and long lead lengths open up the potential for signal loss, noise, and parasitic oscillation. PCB design minimizes or eliminates these problems by keeping signal paths short, with minimum solder. Quality board material using healthy copper width and thickness sounds as good as, or better, than copper wire and will last every bit as long as point-to-point amps. PCB design is full of potential, is infinitely variable, and allows blending tried-and-true components with the latest in new component technology. But the biggest benefit is that we don't have to reinvent the wheel every time we make an amp.

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$99 street

lunaguitars.com / *Buy on Amazon*

4
KALA

KA-SEM Exotic Mahogany

Mahogany is used for the neck, top, back, and sides of this soprano, which also features a GraphTech NuBone nut and saddle, an amber-satin finish, and a walnut fretboard.

$99 street

kalabrand.com / *Buy on Amazon*

5
GRETSCH

G9100

Pearloid dot inlays and open-gear tuners provide a classic look, while a genuine bone nut and saddle assist with resonance for this mahogany top, back, and sides uke.

$99 street

gretschguitars.com / *Buy on Amazon*

6

CORDOBA

15SM

This uke's all-mahogany construction is intended to deliver full, rich sound, and features include an abalone rosette, ABS binding, and a sleek satin finish.

$89 street

cordobaguitars.com / *Buy on Amazon*

7

PONO

AS

Solid acacia for the top, back, and sides, and ebony for the fretboard and bridge compliment the rope-marquetry rosette and bone nut and saddle on this soprano.

$299 street

koolauukulele.com

8

IBANEZ

UEWS5

The cutaway and C-shape neck makes for even easier access to all frets on this mahogany uke, while the abalone rosette and chrome open-gear tuners provide some *nani*.

$99 street

ibanez.com / *Buy on Amazon*

9

MAGIC FLUKE

Flea

With 3-ply Australian hoop pine for the top and acoustically resonant thermoplastic for the body, these colorful ukes offer easy playability with plenty of personality.

$225 street

magicfluke.com

10

LANIKAI

SPST-S

This morado-body uke has a solid spruce top for good projection and punchy tone, and features include a NuBone XB nut and saddle.

$189 street

lanikaiukuleles.com / *Buy on Amazon*

Quick Hits

BOGNER
Ecstasy Blue Mini

BY JASON SHADRICK

Nearly 30 years ago, Reinhold Bogner debuted the Ecstasy amp and planted his flag as an in-demand builder for the hard rock and metal set. The flagship Ecstasy models were so successful that in 2012 the company introduced pedals inspired by Ecstasy circuits. The logical next step was to offer a pared-down stomp with nearly all the features in half the space. Naturally, the sound of Bogners brings to mind gained-up heavy riffs, but the Ecstasy Blue offers quite a bit more to those who live near the lower end of the gain scale.

Reinhold packed all the essential elements of the Blue's big brother into this compact pedal. It has an active 3-band EQ, a variac switch, a 3-way gain toggle, and three different EQ profiles. The variac offers a more compressed sound, which worked great with my T-style Schroeder. I was able to get that sought-after sag and feel at a more manageable volume. On the low- and mid-gain settings, the clarity and harmonic richness was quite stunning. Hang with me here, but I could totally use this on anything from a honky-tonk gig to the Wednesday night blues jam.

Don't let the Bogner pedigree fool you. The Ecstasy Blue is a fantastic and powerful dirt box that covers more ground than one might expect. Not surprisingly, it's built like a bomb shelter and adds just enough features to keep more simple-minded players like myself from being paralyzed by choice. PG

TEST GEAR *Schroeder Chopper TL, Fender Jaguar P-90, Gibson Les Paul Custom, Fender Hot Rod DeVille IV*

RATINGS

Tones	5
Ease of Use	4.5
Build/Design	4.5
Value	4.5

$199 street

bogneramplification.com

Buy on Amazon

PROS Incredible low- and mid-gain tones. Versatile EQ controls and useful EQ profiles.

CONS Would love option for a switchable boost.

Hear a demo now.

ROCKET SURGEON
Codename: Black Hat

BY SHAWN HAMMOND

Whereas many twin-knob fuzzes aim for vintage Tone Bender, Fuzz Face, or Fuzzrite vibes, Rocket Surgeon's new 3-transistor affair (two silicon, one germanium) infiltrates a less-explored—and intriguingly practical—middle ground that offers shades of all three while eschewing those designs' quirkier, less-predictable aspects. Codename: Black Hat won't avail squealing gated sounds, corpulent octave overtones, or busted-AM-radio fizz. Instead, it offers uncommon touch sensitivity and handily linear fuzz tones that are still refreshing amidst a sea of yesteryear wannabes.

Twist Black Hat's volume control to its unity-gain point (around 11 o'clock), set the gain knob at minimum, and bask in a crisp, articulate fuzz with wonderful treble and high-mid clarity—almost like a Fuzzrite exorcised of its shrieking demons. Turn volume up, and saturation and harmonic complexity increase in a way that won't earn it a Weirdo Fuzz of the Year award, but that makes it a hugely adaptable utility pedal. Meanwhile, the fuzz knob changes the character of the effect from lean and muscular to a warmer, more filled-out response that never sounds flabby or indistinct. At max, it takes you to the threshold of singing sustain. Even cooler, no matter how you dial it, Black Hat cleans up like a killer tube amp when you rein in your guitar's volume knob. PG

TEST GEAR *Squier Vintage Modified Tele with Curtis Novak Tel-V and JM-V pickups, Eastwood Sidejack Baritone DLX with Curtis Novak Jazzmaster Widerange pickups, Catalinbread Topanga, MXR Reverb, SoundBrut DRVA MkII, Jaguar HC50 and Fender Rumble 200 amps*

RATINGS

Tones	4.5
Ease of Use	5
Build/Design	5
Value	4.5

$169 street

nordstrandaudio.com

PROS Wonderfully responsive to playing dynamics and guitar-volume manipulation. Incredibly useful range of lean-and-mild to muscular-and-bristling sounds.

CONS Visual vibe isn't for everyone. Too staid for tonal anarchists.

Hear a demo now.

ASHDOWN
Tone Pocket

BY RICH OSWEILER

Headphone amps are nothing new, but they continue to get smaller and more feature rich. The svelte and stealthy Ashdown Tone Pocket is no exception. It's about an inch tall with an approximately 4" x 4" footprint and weighs all of a half-pound, making it right at home in a guitar-case compartment, gig bag, or under your pillow.

The Tone Pocket's command center is its 3-band EQ: bass, mid, and treble dials with +/- 15 dB on each band. A volume dial rounds out the control quartet. After the short time it took to put headphones on and plug in my bass, I was gifted with transparent and distortion-free tone with plenty of volume and headroom, and no worries about upsetting a family member or neighbor. A little bump on the bass and treble controls was all I needed to set and forget.

Around back there are 10V and 12V power-supply options, a balanced line out, and a USB port, which functions as a third power-supply option and a link to your DAW of choice. It was a breeze setting up the Tone Pocket as an interface for recording a couple sound clips. More importantly, I didn't experience any latency issues to speak of. The Tone Pocket's price tag isn't exactly pocket change, but when inspiration strikes, you have quick and easy (and good) amplified sound at the ready. PG

TEST GEAR *Fender Precision, Orange O Bass, Monster Inspiration headphones*

RATINGS

Tones	
Ease of Use	
Build/Design	
Value	

$199 street

ashdownmusic.com

PROS Compact and light with nice-sounding preamp. Handy recording interface. Eight hours of playing time per charge.

CONS Pricey if only using as a headphone amp.

Hear a demo now.

WAY HUGE
Purple Platypus

BY CHARLES SAUFLEY

Octave and fuzz are so naturally (if dementedly) matched that it's almost unusual to see an octave pedal without fuzz. But octave effects can be made more articulate and versatile with a lower-gain source of drive. This concept inspired Jeorge Tripp's original Purple Platypus, and the new MkII version reviewed here.

Fundamentally, the Purple Platypus is derived from the Dan Armstrong Green Ringer and Tripp's Red Llama overdrive, which was rooted in Craig Anderton's Tube Sound Fuzz design. Unlike some super-glitchy octave fuzzes, the Platypus' sustain is impressive when you keep the gain wide open.

Extra versatility comes via the new hi-cut knob. Trebly settings at low-mid gain levels generate a range of cool electric sitar approximations, while maximum gain levels create articulate, circa-'66 biker fuzz tones. Counterclockwise hi-cut settings, meanwhile, are cool for blurry desert-rock rhythm. But some of the coolest rhythm tones come at mid-gain, neutral hi-cut settings. Here again, the low gain levels lend detail, giving power chords concise, punchy presence. Platypus is also responsive to guitar volume attenuation, and reducing guitar volume can accent octave content and enable you to hear extra detail through the reduced sizzle. Chord arpeggios sound especially cool at these settings. For octave newbies, the Purple Platypus may not necessarily be more intuitive than the average octave/fuzz, but it offers many appealing colors from an arguably easier-to-manage tone palette. PG

TEST GEAR *Fender Stratocaster, Rickenbacker 330, Fender Telecaster Deluxe with Curtis Novak Widerange humbuckers, '68 Fender Bassman, Fender Champ*

RATINGS

Tones	
Ease of Use	
Build/Design	
Value	

$149 street

jimdunlop.com

Buy on Amazon

PROS Low-mid gain profile generates cool, unusual colors. Useful hi-cut control. Responsive to guitar volume attenuation.

CONS Some low-gain settings can sound thin with single-coils.

Hear a demo now.

HERITAGE
H-137SC

By Ted Drozdowski

WATCH THE REVIEW DEMO NOW.

Two pickups, four dials, and a slab of mahogany. It's a classic rock 'n' roll guitar format. Players have dug it since 1955, when Gibson introduced the Les Paul Special as a cheaper alternative to its flagship solidbody, the Les Paul. In the decades since, guitarists from John Lennon to Johnny Thunders have championed the Special. Why? Because it's simple and it's badass.

Simple and badass are good ways to describe the new Heritage H-137SC, too. The two P-90s and the single-cutaway mahogany body are clear homage to the Special. (Little surprise, given that Heritage was started by Gibson defectors in 1985). And just like that Gibson classic, this guitar is a ticket to rock 'n' roll happiness.

Nuts 'n' Bolts

Our review example arrived in a sturdy hardshell case and was aglow in a nitrocellulose tobacco original sunburst finish. (It's also available in TV yellow.) Heritage touts the H-137SC as "lightweight," but that's subjective. The 1-piece mahogany body weighs in at about 9.5 pounds—a pound more than my own '58 Les Paul Special and about 2.5 pounds heavier than the average Stratocaster. The weight feels worth it, though.

It adds to the sturdy feel of the build and, quite possibly, the guitar's tone.

The fretboard of the 24 3/4" scale-length mahogany neck is rosewood and has a 12" radius. It's got 22 frets, in the Gibson and Heritage traditions, and they're Jescar medium jumbos, which encourage swaggering string bending. The neck profile is a shallow C shape, which is quite easy to mange for pickers that favor thin necks. The nut is Corian and the guitar has a wraparound bridge and Grover tuners, finished in shiny nickel. The 500k pots are made by CTS, and the caps are .022 µF Vishays—both dependable and widely used brands. The setup, by the way, was excellent.

The Playoff

Most of my guitars are pretty basic, so with its comfy neck, medium-jumbo frets, and simple controls, the H-137SC felt and sounded instantly gratifying. I took the guitar straight to a gig, and it proved very tuning stable—holding standard and open-G tunings while I smacked it around with abandon, just as an axe like this should be. Really, though, smacking the heck out of this guitar isn't a requirement. It's not just for punk and rough-and-tumble rock. Tone attenuation makes it sweet and tubby, and you can flip the 3-way selector switch for country, jazz, or whatever-y'all-want sounds thanks to the versatile pair of Lollar P-90s. That said, this guitar's voice sounded most classic when plugged into a Marshall or my Carr Vincent with the overdrive circuit on. With these toothy amp tones, the Heritage just plain snarls.

My own '58 Gibson Les Paul Special is a familiar favorite. So I had to let these two instruments—which have an identical 1 3/4" body thickness, near-identical necks, and double P-90s—wrestle. Both guitars sounded ace, plugged into just about anything, and the Heritage more than easily held its own against the vintage Gibson. I played both instruments into an Orange Micro Terror powering up a 1x12 Celestion 25-watt custom cabinet, a Fender Twin Reverb, a Marshall Super Lead paired with the same Celestion, and the Carr Vincent, which has an Eminence Red Coat the Wizard 75-watt speaker. The Heritage has a bold voice that sounds like it could cut through just about any live mix, with plenty of edge and sustain, and the sonic difference between the new Heritage and the vintage Gibson was minimal. The '58 had a slightly brighter profile overall, with a lot of air in the notes, while the Heritage had a darker, slightly fatter tone—but the contrast was a matter of aural microns. I'd play either guitar any day, anywhere, anytime.

The Verdict

Guitarists who want a classic-sounding, classic-playing, and classic-looking 6-string will dig the Heritage H-137SC. Period. It's a no-frills, well-built, rock 'n' roll machine that should withstand many decades of hard playing. At $1,899, it costs more than Gibson USA's most affordable Les Paul Special, which retails for about a grand, but it's much less than a Gibson Custom Shop version. It's a matter of taste and budget. If P-90 tones aren't your bag—or you're looking for the versatility of coil tapping, or a fresher body design—this ain't your rig. But the Heritage H-137SC is 100 percent ready to rock if you are. PG

"With its comfy neck, medium-jumbo frets, and simple controls, the H-137SC felt and sounded instantly gratifying."

RATINGS

Tones	4.5
Playability	5
Build/Design	4.5
Value	4.5

PROS A classic formula very well executed.

CONS Not too much deviation from the original design inspiration.

$1,899 street
heritageguitars.com

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THIRD MAN + MANTIC
Flex

By Charles Saufley

WATCH THE REVIEW DEMO NOW.

Jack White is a master of weaving ugly-duckling sounds into pop music's vernacular. So it's little wonder why he saw the appeal in Mantic's excellent phase-locked loop (PLL) mayhem generator, the Flex. This new version is co-branded with Mantic and the name of White's Third Man Records. But it marks a return to the design origins of the Flex, which has since evolved into a more complex variant called the Flex Pro. The Third Man version is the only way to get the original, simpler Flex. But while "simple" may be a useful descriptor for the relative number of controls, it does little to describe the many bizarre and demented tones and textures this circuit generates.

Gone Real Loopy

It's something of a paradox that PLL circuitry can be responsible for such bizarreness in a guitar signal chain. In essence, a PLL is designed to lend stability to a signal by keeping waves from an input signal and a variable-controlled oscillator locked in phase with each other. They are used in many electronic applications and, among other things, are instrumental in helping you precisely dial in a radio station. In the world of sound synthesis, PLLs can generate steady, sustained output when using a constant input source—say, a sine wave from a keyboard. But the relative irregularity of a guitar's input—brimming as it is with harmonics and string overtones—complicates the work of the PLL as it tries to keep the guitar input and VCO signals in phase. And when you mate that dynamic to the somewhat "ugly" sounds of a fuzzy square wave, the results range from chaotic to totally unpredictable.

Mantic's PLL is unique. It's not derived from the justly revered Schumann PLL that is the starting point for many stompbox PLL circuits. And in Third Man guise, the Flex's control set is much simpler than the Schumann and many other PLL effects. The "lvl" is a master output (and man, is there a lot of volume on tap here). The focus control determines the range within which the waves can lock, but also feels and performs somewhat like an attack control on a synth. The pump, or VCO discharge control, enables you to tinker with the resistance between the VCO input and phase comparator, which destabilizes the PLL. The two toggles allow selection between short and long decay lengths, and fast and slower attack ranges.

Chaos Generator

It's best to be prepared for strangeness and surprises when you hunt for sounds in the Flex. And it's important to note that many sounds can be difficult to produce twice, given the highly interactive nature of the pump and focus controls, in particular. In this way, working with the Flex is much like interacting with an early modular synth.

Nevertheless, there are several ranges where the pedal reacts in a generally consistent manner. With the pump and focus knobs all the way counterclockwise, a D played at the 12th fret on the fourth string will drop by an octave, taking on the fuzzy fatness of a keyboard synth. But nudge the pump knob up about 30 percent and the low octave disappears, replaced by a fast decaying fundamental that's followed by a sort of fractured police siren tone that seems to rise in three or four glitchy, full-step intervals before dropping off a cliff. Move the pump up another 30 percent and the siren sound follows the fundamental in a fragmented full pitch-up, pitch-down cycle. With the pump control at maximum, you get an even smoother siren cycle. Though such sounds

can feel beyond your control at times, you can manipulate the pitch shift in interesting ways with string bends and odd melodic intervals.

You don't have to move the focus control much beyond its minimum setting before you begin to hear more fundamental note content and recover a measure of pick control. Interestingly, the best bet for preserving the melodic integrity of a passage (a curious motivation, perhaps, if you've elected to use this pedal in the first place) is to keep your picking active and the attack on the faster end of the pedal's range. But there are also settings, usually with the focus and pump situated in the middle third of their respective ranges, where you can take advantage of Mantic's buzzy, synthy fuzz voice without relying on eighth and sixteenth note picking for sustain. Many of these settings are very musical, if still unpredictable. But they are particularly effective in A/B amplifier rigs where you can devote one signal to the Mantic's output and another to more conventional fuzz tones. (Mantic's more "conventional" fuzzy textures are an especially cool complement to wooly Muff and RAT tones.)

In the up position, the "&" toggle activates a slower attack mode—strangling and filtering your note a bit. In the down position, you hear note fundamentals more immediately. The "$" toggle, meanwhile, dictates decay length. In the up position, notes linger longer. This setting is key to more conventional sustaining fuzz tones.

The Verdict

It's important to reiterate that many of the tones described here can be tough to replicate exactly. And apart from the sensitive and interactive controls, differences in guitars, pickups, and playing approach can become tricky compound variables. But such unpredictability is half the fun of using the Flex. The complex and unusual sounds you can generate can pepper an arrangement in small but striking doses or underpin whole riffs. And if you have the curiosity to learn and understand the controls' quirky interrelationships, you'll uncover synth sounds and fuzz textures quite outside clichéd associations with either category.

RATINGS

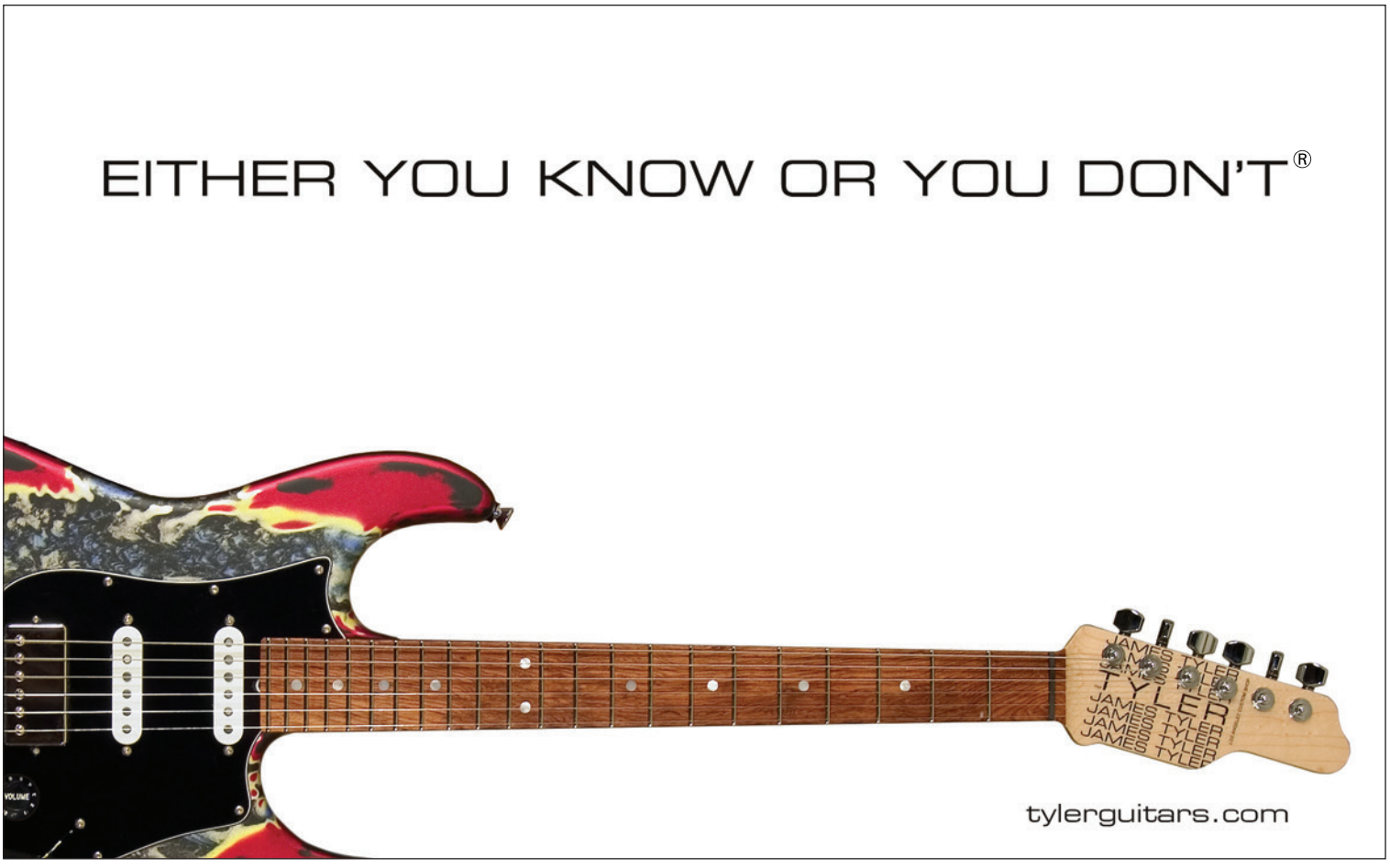
Tones	
Ease of Use	
Build/Design	
Value	

PROS Powerful, rich, PLL-driven synth- and fuzz-style tones. Awesomely unpredictable. Loud when you want it to be.

CONS Twitchy controls. Terrifyingly unpredictable.

$200 street

thirdmanrecords.com



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PREMIER GEAR

BALTHAZAR
Film Noir 50

By Joe Gore

HEAR A DEMO NOW.

Since the ’60s, Pink Floyd has exerted a profound influence on guitarists’ gear choices: Big Muffs, Echorecs, black Strats, Hiwatt amps.... You get the picture.

But those items were all popularized by David Gilmour. We don’t hear as much about the gear favored by the band’s original guitarist and frontman, Syd Barrett, who left the group in 1968 due to severe mental illness. You can buy a zillion replicas of Gilmour’s Big Muff, but as far as I know, the only folks regularly reproducing Barrett’s (alleged) fuzz pedal, the Selmer Buzz Tone, are Jext Telez, a boutique company from Michigan. And you generally don’t hear gearheads rhapsodizing about the Selmer Truvoice Treble ’N’ Bass 50, the amp Barrett used on *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*, Floyd’s sole pre-Gilmour studio album.

Keeping It Weird

Thanks to Chicago-based amp maker Balthazar de Ley, we have a chance to revisit this historic yet largely forgotten model. Balthazar, who for years maintained the mountains of gear owned by the Smashing Pumpkins, based his Film Noir 50 head on the Syd Selmer. It’s not a pure clone—the original had both treble and bass channels, and only the former is replicated here. De Ley added a master volume control and a Vox-style treble-cut knob in the power stage. He also re-voiced the preamp to, in his words, “warm it up a bit and make it more pedal-friendly.”

Like early-’60s Marshalls, the Treble ’N’ Bass is more than a little “inspired” by Fender’s Bassman. Yet de Ley retained Selmer’s oddest deviation from the Fullerton template: a power-supply section that employs a choke the size of an output

transformer. "For reasons I can only guess at," notes Balthazar, "they made the unusual decision to set up the amp's power supply with *all* of the so-called B+ voltage passing through the amp's choke. The result is a particular kind of sag and bloom that I think defines the amp. Normally the choke is the smallest transformer on your amp, but in this case it has to handle so much current because of the oddball design, and has to be as large as the other transformers. It's heavy, it's expensive, and at NAMM shows it leaves other amp designers shaking their heads."

I've never played an original, and didn't know much about the amp till now. For example, when I unboxed the review model, I wondered why Balthazar covered it in a faux-alligator material reeking of '90s hair metal. That shows you how little I knew: The early-'60s originals were also garbed in similar mock-'gator. So, for reference, I plugged in and played along with *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*.

Oh yeah! Film Noir 50 *definitely* nails the Syd sound.

Interstellar Overdrive

Film Noir's core voice is rough-edged and throaty. The amp doesn't have vast reserves of clean headroom. It can get clean, but not ultra-sparkly. Its distorted tones, while attractive, max out well short of meltdown, at least without upstream distortion. (More on that in a moment.) The idiosyncratic power supply circuit does indeed add saggy warmth. It's a cool and distinctive sound, if not a particularly versatile one.

Two EL34 tubes provide Film Noir's power, with a pair of 12AX7s in the preamp section. The rectifier tube is a GZ34. Inside and out, the workmanship is top-notch. The amp is hand-wired. The small caps and resistors are tidily assembled on turret board. The wire routing is neat. The soldering is stellar. This amp looks like it will last a long time, and it'll be easy to service should something go wrong. The parts—including Classic Tone and Hammond transformers—are top-drawer.

Tones can be a bit on the wooly side compared to early-'60s Marshall, Fender, and Vox designs, but rolling back the bass control adds clarity. You might not even notice the absence of dedicated midrange knobs. Between the treble dial and the added top-cut pot, you've got much control over the highs. For the first audio clip, I plugged a DIY guitar with vintage-style PAFs directly into the amp. The clip includes maximum-clean and maximum-dirty examples.

Take Up Thy Fuzz Pedal and Squawk

Film Noir's high-gain settings may be relatively restrained, but that leaves a lot of room to shape tones with fuzz pedals. I auditioned Film Noir with a stack of fuzz boxes, and the flavor of each pedal came through loud and clear, as heard in the second audio clip. For the first minute of audio, I play a DIY clone of a Selmer Buzz Tone clone—a primitive design with three germanium transistors that runs at three volts via a pair of AA batteries. The remaining examples feature an assortment of homemade fuzzes.

Film Noir is definitely not "a clean platform for effects," in the usual sense of that contemporary tone cliché. It's too dirty and saggy for that. But damn, it interacts with distortion pedals in endlessly cool and fascinating ways, spawning an unholy menagerie of splats and squawks. This amp loves fuzz.

The Verdict

The Film Noir 50 is a cool and quirky amp. You'll find no fault with Balthazar's expert craftsmanship. The question, really, is whether this oddball speaks your musical language. (Hint: If you dig vintage psychedelia and fuzz sounds unfit for polite company, you're likely to love it.) Yeah, you can probably pick up a functioning original for less than the price of this boutique spinoff—early Selmers are not über-collectible. (Not yet, anyway.) But Film Noir offers improvements on the original design, with greater range and superb build quality. The price isn't over the top for a fine and unique handwired amp. PG

RATINGS

Tones	4.5
Ease of Use	5
Build/Design	5
Value	4.5

PROS Beautifully made. Authentic early Floyd tones. Loves fuzz pedals.

CONS Limited tonal range. Original Selmers might cost less.

$1,849 street

balthazaraudiosystems.com

PEAVEY
Max 150

By David Abdo

WATCH THE REVIEW DEMO NOW.

For bassists on the go, combos are often the handiest means of amplification. And technological innovations over the years have expanded the functionality of these portable devices into all-in-one tools for both practice and performance. Peavey has a long and successful history in the combo game, and the company has consistently enhanced their offerings with the latest developments. Peavey's Max series amps have undergone many transformations as they've evolved, and the latest iteration has all the signs of being a standout in its lineage. The refreshed series contains various pairings of speakers and power amps in the four models offered, but our focus here is the Max 150, Peavey's 1x12 offering with 150 watts of thumpability.

Peavey Parts

Peavey employs an angled baffle with a "waterfall" grille over the front of the cabinet, which is likely the most noticeable visual difference in the modern Max combos. The shaping was designed for better high-frequency dispersion when the combo is on the floor, and helps eliminate the need to tilt the speaker cabinet.

Peavey's tone-shaping options for the Max 150 combine signature features with a streamlined EQ. Inputs for both active and passive basses will accommodate a variety of pickups. The gain section has overdrive capability via the switch below the gain dial, and, next door, a few spices are added to the 3-band EQ.

Below the bass control is a contour switch, which scoops the EQ by cutting mids and boosting highs and lows. The mid-shift switch adjusts the center frequency for the mids to either 600 Hz or 250 Hz. If your tone requires a little shine, the bright switch delivers a 10 dB boost to frequencies above 1 kHz. Conversely, the Kosmos-C switch (aka booty button) creates a massive amount of low end for the subsonic fan. According to Peavey, this enhancement creates harmonics of signals in the bottom octave, providing a perception of stronger bass.

Practical additions to Peavey's latest expand its versatility. They consist of a chromatic tuner, effects loop, DI, speaker output, footswitch jack, and a pair of mini inputs for headphones and playback devices. There's a lot packed into this under-30-pound package.

Take It to the Max

The Max 150 made a great first impression. The strong handle and rugged design instilled confidence it could manage the rigors of working musicians. Historically, I've found the looks of Peavey's products to be hit-or-miss, but the Max 150 gets top marks for its sleek styling and a super-cool grille. In addition to being lightweight, its compact shape made it easy to transport.

I employed a Fender Elite PJ and a Squire Contemporary Active Jazz HH to explore the amp's tones. The combo produced strong mid-range definition, thick lows, and smooth highs. Never did the Max 150 feel lacking in the EQ department, since I could temper or beef up the sound as needed. The PJ's voice opened up with a slight boost at 250 Hz and a slight cut in the bass control. On the other hand, Squire's modern zinger really sang with the bright switch engaged, and I found the contour switch to be sonically effective when slapping and popping strings.

Those who dig a little dirt in their tone will likely appreciate the Max 150's distortion capabilities. I was easily able to go from a slight bite to full-on gnash without worrying about damaging the essential components. Thanks to Peavey's proprietary DDT limiter, safe operation is assured when pushing the gain to its—ahem—max. Even if you're not a regular user of distortion, having it available in the combo is a convenient alternative to schlepping a pedal and additional cables for when you do need it.

Strobe tuners are typically my preferred pitch-fixer, but I was happy to find that the onboard chromatic tuner is fast and accurate. After tuning up both basses using the combo's tuner, I plugged them into a Peterson StroboStomp Classic for comparison and found the open strings to be dead-on in tune.

"Never did the Max 150 feel lacking in the EQ department, since I could temper or beef up the sound as needed."

I had a couple of quibbles with Peavey's little monster. While the engaged Kosmos-C does what it's supposed to by producing lots of low end, I felt that bass notes had a tendency to lose clarity and articulation. This function could be great for dub-heavy players, but I found it to be a bit too muddy for some styles. The other concern came when engaging the switches and tuner. The combo emitted a slight yet noticeable pop when pressing and un-pressing the buttons, and using the tuner. This wouldn't be much of an issue when practicing at home, but could be a potential irritation when miking the cab at shows.

Speaking of shows, I did take the Max 150 to a blues jam, where the amp was part of the house band's gear. No, the 150-watt amp couldn't contend with loud guitars and drums on its own, but it did function well as a personal monitor while, thanks to the amp's DI, the mains and monitors of the house system reinforced my tone. I don't know if the angled baffle provided a *significant* increase in sound, but I was able to hear fairly well with the amp on the stage floor.

The Verdict

Peavey's Max 150 puts a fresh face on the Max combo lineage by augmenting Peavey's consistently rugged design with contemporary features. It's a solid amp for home practice, a coffee-shop show, or small-room rehearsals. You'd typically be hard-pressed to find a quality amp for less than $350, but you can still count on Peavey to offer a solid product with great value.

RATINGS

Tones	4.5
Ease of Use	4.5
Build/Design	3.5
Value	4.5

PROS Thoughtful features packed into a rugged, portable package.

CONS Some loss of clarity with Kosmos-C low enhancement. Noticeable popping sound when tuning and manipulating switches.

$349 street

peavey.com

TAKAMINE
EF360SC TT

By Adam Perlmutter

HEAR A DEMO NOW.

Forty years ago, Takamine introduced its Palathetic system—an acoustic-guitar pickup with six individual piezo transducers that, to many ears, created a more realistic amplified sound than any other device on the market. The system created such a stir that some players cannibalized the electronics from Takamine guitars for use in their own instruments.

Takamine's reputation as a great guitar for live amplification has remained consistent in the decades since. And it's a testament to the Palathetic's great utility that its basic original design is still intact and used on many Takamine guitars, including the EF360SC TT reviewed here. But with a "toasted" torrefied top, the EF360SC TT utilizes more than the company's solid electronics to create a great sounding whole. And if this guitar is any indication, the Japanese builder is making some of its best guitars to date.

Baked to Perfection

The EF360SC TT is a dreadnought with a Venetian cutaway—hence the SC (solid-top cutaway) in the model name. The TT stands for Thermal Top technology, which is Takamine terminology for torrefaction: a process where raw wood is treated via a high heat/low oxygen "toasting" process that (in theory) changes the wood's

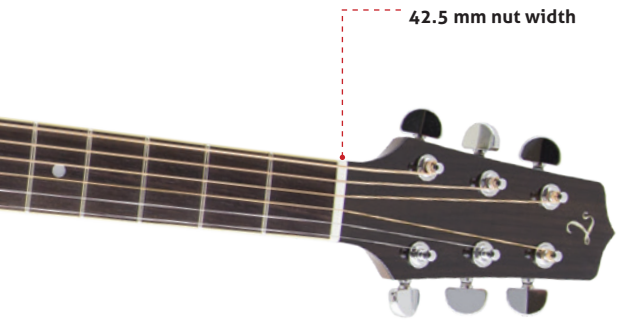
characteristics to sound and respond more like the wood on a vintage guitar. Torrefaction also darkens the coloring of wood, to a degree, and the solid spruce on the review model has taken on a rich amber hue that contrasts nicely with the deep browns of the non-torrefied, solid Indian Rosewood back and sides.

The EF360SC TT is very attractive, in a subdued and traditional way. Ornamentation is minimal and tasteful, with ivoroid body and neck binding, multi-layer purfling on the soundboard and the back, and a rosewood headstock overlay adorned with a script T. My only complaint about the design is that the guitar's black pickguard looks a bit down-market compared to the rest of the appointments.

Handmade in Takamine's shop, in Sakashita, Japan, the EF360SC TT is well built, to say the least. Construction is immaculate from headstock to endpin. Nut slots are perfectly notched, as are those on the split saddle. The frets are perfectly seated, polished, and free of jagged edges. Inside there's not a trace of excess glue or any other artifacts of the manufacturing process.

A Refined Workhorse

Though the torrefied top is intended to give the EF360SC TT a mature voice, the slim C-shaped neck and faultless, high-gloss finish give the Takamine a decidedly modern feel. At well over five pounds (the extra weight is largely attributable to the electronics system), the EF360SC TT doesn't entirely float on the lap. On the other hand, many guitarists will find that the EF360SC TT plays better than the typical dreadnought. It shipped from the factory with perfect low action. There were no dead spots or buzzing anywhere along the neck, and intonation was spot-on. While 1.75" nut width is increasingly common these days—and not just the preference of fingerstylists—the EF360SC TT's nut width is a more typical, vintage-style 42.5 mm (1.67 "). But just as with those older guitars, the Takamine doesn't feel cramped in the slightest.



The EF360SC TT doesn't seem geared toward a particular style, in the way that, say, an old Martin D-18 or D-28 is a quintessential bluegrass machine. Nor does it always sound completely vintage. At times it seemed to be missing some of the depth you hear in the best vintage flattops. But that's not necessarily a bad thing. And where it might lack a totally authentic vintage voice, it compensates with a balance that makes it forgiving to play and adaptable to many musical situations. Whether I picked G runs on the EF360SC TT, strummed hard, or tried delicate fingerpicking in DADGAD and open-G tunings, I was impressed by the guitar's evenness between registers, projection, and sustain. The bass is strong without being boomy, the midrange is punchy, and the trebles are clear and full. It's also certainly reasonable to expect the EF360SC TT to age as gracefully as a vintage instrument, even with its torrefied head start.

Potent Plugging In

In addition to the undersaddle pickup, the EF360SC TT is equipped with the CT 4B II preamp, which is available only on Japan-built Takamines. The preamp includes +/-5db low-, mid-, and high-band EQ sliders, a volume control, and a built-in chromatic tuner. While the tuner is set to the standard A440, it can be calibrated to other frequencies. When the tuner button is pressed, it mutes the guitar's output, for silent tuning onstage. It's hard to get excited about the aesthetics of the side-mounted preamp, but the unit's functionality makes up for its lack of visual appeal. It's intuitive, the EQ is super flexible, and, plugged into a Fender Acoustasonic amp, the system delivered a very convincing reproduction of the guitar's acoustic sound.

The Verdict

Takamine uses torrefied woods to excellent effect in the EF360SC TT. It's fantastically flexible and beautifully built. It has the solid feel and the sonic versatility of a real workhorse that you may be very reluctant to put down.

RATINGS

Tones	4.5
Playability	5
Build/Design	5
Value	4.5

PROS High-quality, all-solid cutaway dreadnought from one of the top names in the acoustic-electric market.

CONS Side-mounted preamp controls.

$1,799 street
esptakamine.com
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DAMNATION AUDIO
Ugly Twin

By Joe Gore

WATCH THE REVIEW DEMO NOW.

Damnation Audio's Ugly Twin is a perfect example of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. And in this case, it's a spectacularly mutant whole.

The Ugly Twin combines three gain effects in a single enclosure for results than can be far from ordinary. In order of appearance, you get a near-clone of the Dan Armstrong Green Ringer octave fuzz, a single-transistor booster reminiscent of EHX's LPB-1, and a hybrid silicon/germanium fuzz, with an added passive 3-band EQ section and active buffer stage.

There's a dedicated footswitch for each effect, providing seven possible combinations (each effect alone, octave plus boost, octave plus fuzz, boost plus fuzz, and all three together). The effect order is fixed, and each section does pretty much what you'd expect. The surprises occur when you cascade the stages into each other.

> ***"What a splendid cavalcade of filth!"***

Mix and Mash

Each effect's tone varies dramatically according to input level, so boosting any effect colors everything downstream. The circuit isn't dynamic in the sense that you get crispy-clean tones by rolling back your volume knob. It's hard to scrub the dirt off these sounds. But what a splendid cavalcade of filth!

Depending on your settings, tones range from metallic chunk to piercing octaves to sick, swollen fuzz. It's not only the distortion levels that change, though. The speed and intensity of note attack, sustain and compression characteristics, and the harmonic content are equally variable—and that's before you factor in the wide-ranging EQ section. The first audio clip is a grab bag of such mixed-effect sounds.

Let's take a closer look at the individual effects.

It's Not Easy Being Green

Green Ringer-style octave circuits can be fussy. They're not very gainy, and their engaged level can be quieter than bypassed. The original Dan Armstrong Green Ringer had no controls at all, but Ugly Twin's added "ugly" switch provides just the right boost in front of the

octave-generating components, yielding a clearer octave effect and expanding the range of the octave's influence on the boost and fuzz sections. When you roll back your guitar's volume knob, tones don't get cleaner. They get *weirder*. Expect ring-modulated chaos, especially with double-stops and chords.

You can hear the ugly switch in action in the second audio clip. I recorded the initial clean riff with no effects, and then reamped it through the octave effect—first at the traditional Green Ringer level, and then with the ugly switch activated.

The boost stage has sufficient gain to clobber your amp if desired. And since the fuzz section has no gain control, the oversized boost knob does the job when the latter two sections are engaged. The third audio clip showcases various boost levels, commencing with the effect bypassed.

Not Too Anything

Goldilocks would dig the fuzz stage. It's not too bright, not too dark, not too overpowered, and not too wimpy. Its well-voiced tone controls make it a chameleon, capable of mimicking Fuzz Faces, Tone Benders, and Big Muffs, as heard in the fourth audio clip (after a bypassed example). An internal trim pot sets the bias of the germanium transistor.

The Ugly Twin's circuit board features full-sized, through-hole parts and no board-mounted jacks. The layout is clean; the assembly tidy. The pedal runs on standard 9V power supplies. (There's no battery compartment.) The look? Well, ugliness is in the eye of the beholder. But with its Pepto-Bismol pink and bland-but-bold typography, this pedal probably won't be the talk of the 2019 Venice Biennale.

The Verdict

The Ugly Twin assembles familiar functions in a fresh way. The result is a vast collection of aggressive fuzz flavors, with an emphasis on the nasty, brutish, and short-circuited. The pedal is nicely made—and entirely too much fun. And since it truly is three effects in one (four, if you count the active post-fuzz EQ as a separate effect), $249 is a nice price.

RATINGS

Tones	
Ease of Use	
Build/Design	
Value	

PROS Huge collection of cool fuzz flavors. Well made. Fair price.

CONS Abandon subtlety, all ye who enter here.

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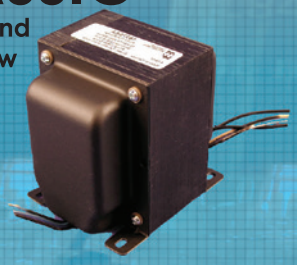

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PREMIER GEAR

HUGHES & KETTNER
Black Spirit 200

By Joe Charupakorn

HEAR A DEMO NOW.

Hughes & Kettner is a reliably forward-thinking amp company. With their blue-lit fascia, multi-knobbed control panels, and high-gain tendencies, they're about as far as you can get from retro-obsessed. And the new Black Spirit 200 couldn't be more emblematic of these modern-amp-design leanings.

The programmable, 4-channel, solid-state amp features a host of built-in effects, can handle about a zillion presets, and includes the company's Red Box AE+ DI/speaker simulator. But the most newsworthy deviation from tradition here might be the Black Spirit's total abandonment of tubes—enabling 200W of power in a compact head that weighs less than eight pounds and can also be set to operate at 2W or 20W output power.

Complex Yet Simple

The Black Spirit's front panel appears busy (little surprise, given its many capabilities), but it's more intuitive than it looks. Push buttons enable several functions, including turning on the power, storing presets, and accessing effects. The three leftmost knobs are dedicated to master volume, presence, and resonance. The next seven knobs, however, serve dual functions. In default position, they control sagging, noise gate, treble, mid, bass, volume, and gain. When the "FX access" button is pushed, the functions switch to a cab-type selector (with eight selectable knob locations), reverb, delay level, feedback, delay time, modulation type (you can choose chorus, flanger, phaser, or tremolo), and modulation intensity. A final knob enables you

to choose from four channels—clean, crunch, lead, and ultra.

Preset options abound on the Black Spirit, which makes 128 programmable locations available as 32 banks of four presets—and is, well, probably more than you'll ever need. As with many amps and pedals that have preset options, amp knob positions stop correlating with what you hear as you switch between presets. But there's an iOS app that lets you visualize and remotely interact with all the parameters in real time (an Android version is in the works).

If you really want to maximize the Black Spirit's potential, getting the optional FSM-432 MK III MIDI board is key. It's a little pricey, at $219, but if you play live and change sounds in real time, it's arguably essential. This seven-button footswitch lets you directly recall presets, use virtual effects in stompbox mode, or tap delay tempos. It's very well made, and switching between presets is seamless, without any popping or noise.

Saving presets is easy on the Black Spirit. You press the store button for two seconds and it overwrites the current preset. If you want to save the preset to a different location, you push the store button quickly and use the footswitch to assign the location where you want to store the sound.

Hughes & Kettner exhibited restraint with the effects selection. Rather than throw every effect under the sun into the unit, they've included staple effects that cover the needs of most guitar players. There are limits beyond just the effects count. You can only use one modulation effect at a time, for example. But if you depend on more esoteric effects, you're not out of luck: You can simply patch external effects in via the effects loop.

Generating Splendid Spirits

I tested the Black Spirit with a Celestion-equipped 1x12 cabinet using an Ernie Ball/Music Man Axis Sport. I started with the clean channel set with presence around 9 o'clock, resonance around 1 o'clock, gain around 7 o'clock, and sagging, noise gate, and all EQ controls at noon. I also applied a little slapback echo and reverb. The sound was clear, with a slight put perceptible compression— perfect for muted, single-note, pop-funk rhythm figures. Adding chorus gave the same settings a dreamy, atmospheric texture perfect for lush, complex chords. Using the crunch channel with presence at around 1 o'clock, resonance around 1 o'clock, gain at 10 o'clock, and sagging, noise gate, and all EQ controls at noon (plus a touch of flanger), I generated rhythm sounds with an aggressive bite.

The lead and ultra channels are excellent for heavy styles, and can cover the gamut from thrash to modern, detuned metal. I got great results with the ultra channel's presence around 1 o'clock, gain at maximum, the noise gate around 1 o'clock, and sagging and all EQ controls at noon. Having a built-in noise gate helps make these over-the-top sounds useable, though at these gain levels, fast 6th-string chugging felt a bit muddy. I was able to solve that problem by reducing the resonance, which meant output with less body but a lot more clarity. The sagging control is useful for these kinds of dynamic adjustments, too. More aggressive sagging settings gave the amp a more liquid feel, making quick, upper-register playing much easier.

The Verdict

At $879, the Black Spirit is not cheap for a solid-state amp. Interestingly, the Black Spirit's tube-equipped siblings, like the GrandMeister Deluxe 40, are only a couple of hundred bucks more. But given its deep clean-to-high-gain tone-shaping capabilities, this amp will be worth the money to many players—particularly on the shred end of the spectrum and those into the notion of a compact, self-contained amp/effects setup that can fit in an airplane overhead and handle an arena-sized gig. Factor in the Black Spirit's Red Box direct-out capability and you've got a very enticing and utilitarian package for the price. PG

RATINGS

Tones	
Ease of Use	
Build/Design	
Value	

PROS Great sounds across all channels. Flexible programmability.

CONS Optional footswitch is expensive, but critical for best functionality.

$879 street

hughes-and-kettner.com

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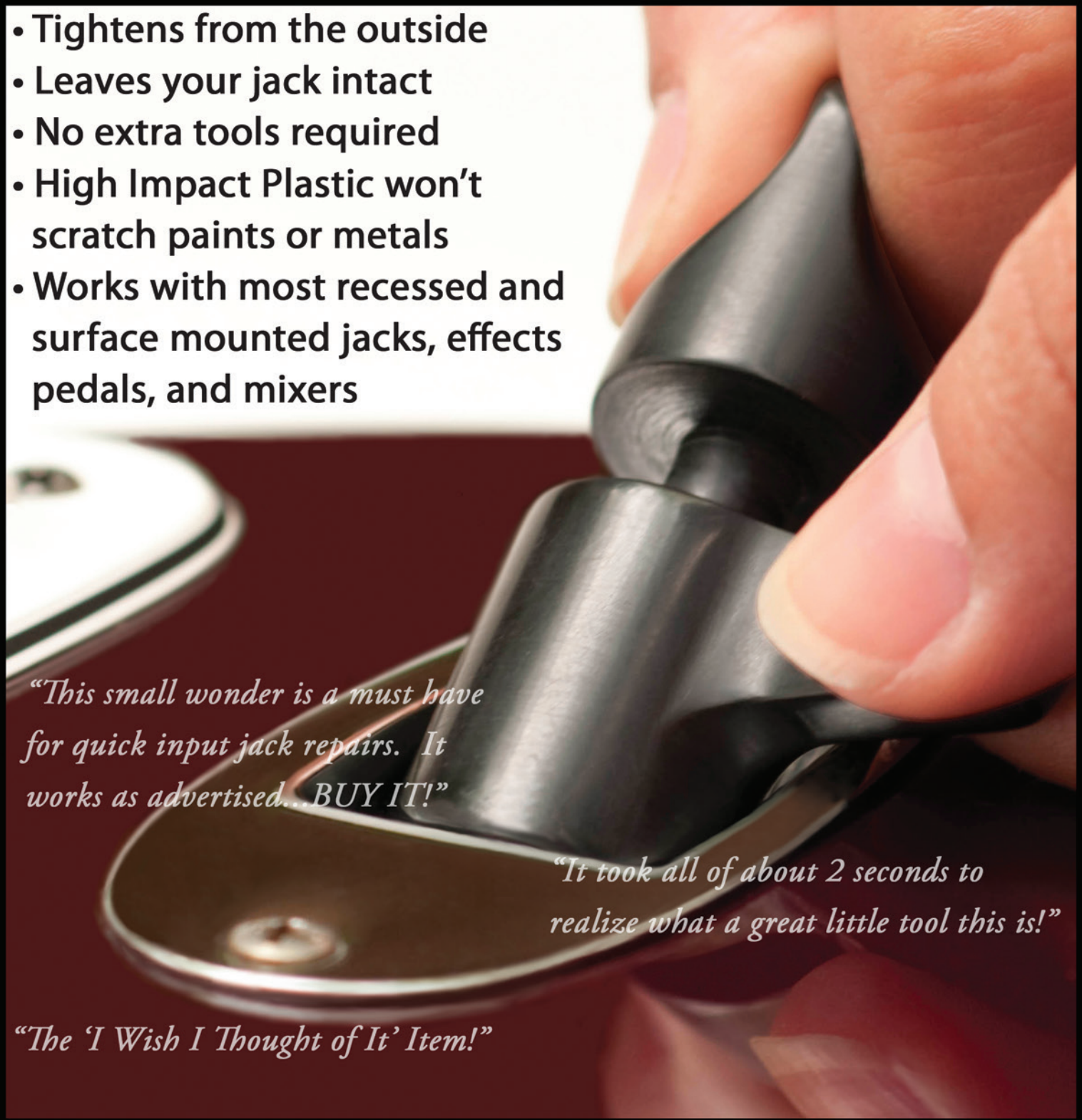

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PREMIER GEAR

KOMET
K.O.D.A

By Joe Gore

HEAR A DEMO NOW.

Baton Rouge, Louisiana-based Komet Amplification is best known for their flagship amplifier model, the Komet 60. Trainwreck mastermind Ken Fischer designed it before his untimely death in 2006. Their debut pedal is the K.O.D.A., short for Komet Overdrive Amplifier.

Thinking Inside the Box

Komet bills the K.O.D.A. as an amp-in-a-box—a description applied to an entire species of stompbox. Like most pedals of that description, it's more useful in front of an amp than as an amp simulator. (Though you can get good faux-amp sounds using software speaker emulations.)

Most such pedals mimic a particular amp, often by replicating its circuitry with transistors standing in for tubes. The K.O.D.A. is different. It's not about making your Fender tweed sound like a Marshall plexi, or vice-versa. It's more of a Swiss Army tone tool whose controls happen to mirror those of a vintage-style amp. It doesn't do freaky stuff. It always sounds conventionally amp-like. But it can definitely expand an amp's tonal range.

All Gain, No Pain

Any player who has spent time thinking about gain-staging—that is, how the boost stages in your signal chain interact, and the sonic consequences of boosting in one location rather than another—is likely to understand the K.O.D.A. within minutes.

Here, you have four active gain stages plus active bass and treble tone controls. The drive control is simply a clean input boost, though there's ample power gain to make a clean amp dirty. Next comes gain, a distortion stage. You can summon a broad spectrum of tones with varying drive/gain mixes. If the K.O.D.A. had only these two knobs, it would be pretty darn useful.

Sculpting with EQ

The K.O.D.A.'s 2-band tone control is gorgeous. Their ranges are relatively narrow. They focus on the frequencies and levels you're likeliest to need. Again, they don't produce extreme effects, but there are literally no unusable settings. Treble adds just the right slice. You can

further refine its effect with a subtle 3-position bright switch (off, mild treble cut, and a slightly less-mild treble cut).

The bass knob can add nice low-mid mass, but don't be surprised if you find yourself using it subtractively. Multiple gain stages can accumulate overpowering lows, yielding muddy tones. But with the right bass cut, you can slather on more gain while maintaining definition.

The Sound of Power

The K.O.D.A.'s ace in the hole is its output stage control—a damn good power-amp simulation. When cranked, the knob replicates the low-end thump and smooth compression of a hard-working non-master-volume amp. It makes your amp sound loud, even when it's not. (You can toggle this stage out of the circuit if desired.)

The K.O.D.A.'s final stage is a simple master volume control. At low settings, you can crank the upstream controls for color without necessarily incinerating your amp. Or you might keep the boost and gain controls low, and use volume for a nice clean boost.

My demo clip online demonstrates a few possible K.O.D.A. scenarios. I recorded a short phrase using only the PAF bridge pickup of a DIY guitar, and then reamped it repeatedly through a small Fender-flavored combo set to a rather wimpy clean tone. You hear the bypassed sound first, followed by a grab bag of possible settings. The amp's knobs never move.

The K.O.D.A. lives in a standard BB-sized enclosure with Boss-style knobs. There's room for a battery, or you can use any standard 9V power supply.

The Verdict

If there's such a thing as a drive pedal for tone snobs, the K.O.D.A. is an example. It's not radical enough to reconfigure your sound, but it can fatten, sharpen, and refine it. It's a bit Klon-like in that regard, but with interactive gain stages and a lovely active tone circuit. The pedal would be especially useful perched on a studio desktop, shaping sounds to suit a mix. It was obviously voiced by guitarists with good ears, and those are the players likeliest to appreciate this refined tool.

RATINGS

Tones	♥♥♥♥♥
Ease of Use	♥♥♥♥♥
Build/Design	♥♥♥♥♡
Value	♥♥♥♥♡

PROS Fine tones. Easy interface. Super useful.

CONS Doesn't do freaky, over-the-top fuzz.

$249 street

kometamps.com

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TRICKFISH
Trilobite

By Steve Cook

WATCH THE REVIEW DEMO NOW.

The late Richard Ruse founded Trickfish Amplification in 2014. Fueled by the intention of building high-end bass gear for the discerning player, the company released its flagship amplifier, called the Bullhead. Because today's bassist wants consistency in an inconsistent gig world, adaptability is one of the features the Trickfish brass wanted to integrate into their newest creation. How players could benefit from the Bullhead's preamps to get its tone onstage, in the studio, and in the woodshed from a portable, user-friendly package is the question Trickfish engineers asked, and thus created their newest aquatic themed creation: the Trilobite.

Tri This One

The Trilobite is a powerful DI with a footprint about the size of a mini iPad, and weighs in at less than 2 pounds, which makes it pedalboard friendly. It has a clean face with three stomp switches, two rows of gain and EQ controls, and a back panel that, at first glance, may look a bit overwhelming to some. I promise this is not the case, however, because the folks at

Trickfish made the Trilobite relatively easy for every level of player to manage.

The Trilobite is a 2-channel system, which utilizes the preamps from the aforementioned Bullhead amp. This configuration lets you dial in two EQ settings, which can be used for one instrument or two, selectable via the dual/mono switch on the rear panel. This is especially helpful for players that need, say, upright and electric EQs—or maybe your fretless EQ is different from your other electric bass. *Or*, if you're working just one bass, use one channel with the switchable effects loop, and easily toggle between your dialed-in settings.

Another nice feature of the Trilobite is the pair of XLR outs. The benefit of this setup is twofold. First, both can be used in tandem to send one signal to FOH and another to your in-ear set up, which you can then blend via your belt pack. This helps because then you can hear your tone in your in-ears—important for a great gig—and have some tonal control. And in the studio, using the effects loop, one can dirty up the signal with the aux XLR. When selecting the pre out on the main DI, the aux defaults to post mode. This is effective because you can track two bass parts at once, giving the producer an unfettered option in case the effects used on the other pass need to change.

Did I mention the 1/8" aux in and headphone out? Did I mention there's a dedicated tuner out to clean up your signal chain? A separate tuner out may not *seem* like a big deal, but to me, it means there is one less piece to troubleshoot if problems arise.

All Treats, No Tricks

I used both an active Sandberg California and a passive Fender JMJ Mustang for this review. The basses are on different ends of the tonal wheel, and I know what each bass *should* sound like. I ran the Trilobite into my PreSonus Studio One and utilized Ultrasone Studio headphones to get a very accurate picture of the EQ section.

First up was the J-style Sandberg. When I plugged it into the Trilobite, I was able to quickly dial in a *really* sweet tone on channel A by boosting the bass a little and rolling off the high mids and highs just a hair. The EQ on the Trilobite is powerful yet detailed, and won't let you get into a huge amount of trouble. The knobs are pretty tight, so turns make subtle changes, and if your cable accidentally hits a knob, you'll be safe.

My Mustang strung with flats gave me similar results. A great tone is not hard to dial up, and ear-pleasing fixes are precise. I was able to get a little more subterranean with the short-scale Mustang, and I loved how the low end of the Trilobite pleased my inner reggae. Leaving the islands and getting back to reality, the nuances of the bass came alive when I switched to channel B and rolled in more mids, which can be heard in **Clip 1**.

With bass effects, we have to deal with the typical low-end drop-off from time to time when using something like overdrive, so I appreciate the Trilobite's effects blend control on the rear panel. The control isn't so much a wet/dry blend, but rather sounds more like a second amp being turned up with the dry signal. Speaking of the rear panel, it can get a bit crowded very quickly. The routing options are great, but when using straight 1/4" cables (like I was), the effects blend control—located below the jacks—is all but inaccessible in the heat of battle. For a fix, Trickfish suggests using space-saving pedalboard cables to best take advantage of all the rear's features.

The Verdict

What can one say about a great sounding DI that offers rich EQs, lots of routing options, and weighs less than 2 pounds? I'd say well done. The Trilobite is a powerful unit that could easily find a home in a lot of studios and on live pedalboards. I appreciate the options that are available and would like them even more if the back panel wasn't quite so crowded. Tonally, the Trilobite is a beast, and that's the best and most important part. If you're in search of a *solution* DI, the Trilobite is worth a try. PG

RATINGS

Tones	
Ease of Use	
Build/Design	
Value	

PROS Great tone. Easy navigation.

CONS Crowded back panel.

$599 street

trickfishamps.com

QUESTION & OBSESSION

***Q:** What pro guitarist's pedalboard has impressed or influenced you the most?*

GUEST PICKER

CASS MCCOMBS

A: For years I was ethically against the use of pedals. It seemed like a crutch, or worse, a distraction from the real raw energies, which is what the hands are doing. There's nothing a pedal can do that Angus Young can't do with two volume knobs. And Bo Diddley, John Lee Hooker. No pedals. Then one day, I added a tuner and it was all over. I'd opened up Pandora's stompbox. I'm really into how Curt Kirkwood of the Meat Puppets saturates gain and delay. He keeps his pedalboard to a minimum, it seems, and somehow can bend just a couple pedals into outer-space warfare to Ornette Coleman territory to metal, blues, country, whatever ... it always goes back to the hands. That's what the guy who owned the guitar shop when I was a kid told me.

CURRENT OBSESSION:
The 12-string guitar. Thumb and fingerpicks, the whole nine yards. I've had a 12-string for years and used it on a few records, but now I have it out and play it every day. There are so many tones that come out of it, kind of like magic. It has a cling-clang sensibility that attracts spontaneous choices. I was listening to Jesse Fuller recently and it inspired me to pull out the 12-string. You get to go down the rabbit hole with all the 12-string players ... Willie McTell, Rev. Gary Davis, Lead Belly. It's loud even when it's quiet—I like that.

Left: Photo by Silvia Grav

READER OF THE MONTH

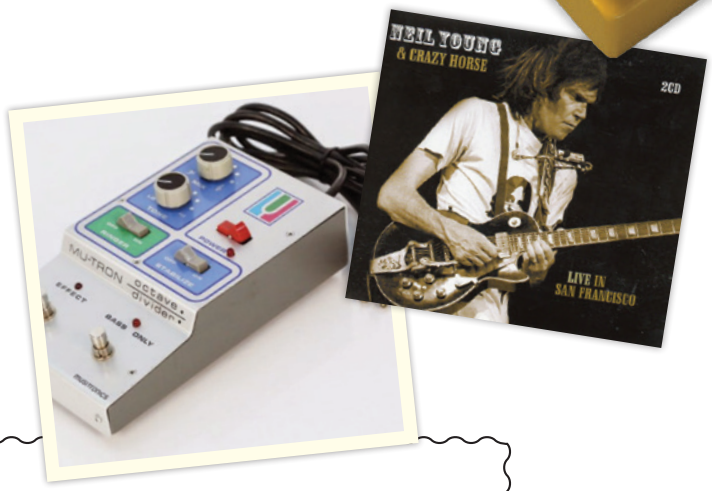
Richard Coveduck

A: Lindsey Buckingham. A Rick Turner Model 1 into a Mesa/Boogie Triple Rectifier. In between, just two, only two pedals: a basic Boss overdrive and a basic Boss delay. That's it, plus immense talent and hard work. Admirable!

CURRENT OBSESSION:
The compositional craft of Lady Gaga, musically and lyrically. She transcends genre, both pop and jazz, while I take her songs into acoustic/electric blues guitar. Jeff Beck's version of "Bad Romance": Wow! I remember the Beatles arrival; she is comparable. Here's a photo of me with her: I'm the old guy in the 1972 jean jacket. The jacket's been to Clapton, Zeppelin, Russell, Floyd, all the way up to Grande. I love music!

SENIOR EDITOR

Ted Drozdwoski



A: David Gilmour's, circa '73-'75, when his rig included the Dallas Arbiter Fuzz Face, Colorsound Power Boost, Binson Echorec, and the elusive Synthi Hi-Fly—the more playful ingredients for *Wish You Were Here* and *Dark Side of the Moon*.

CURRENT OBSESSION:
Finding a truly interesting sounding vintage-style fuzz clone that's stage worthy. I've lately been seeking something that apes the Burns Buzzaround, with Robert Fripp's *In the Court of the Crimson King* solo tone in mind. Got to find out who makes an awesome one, with that fat spread and middy sizzle!

GEAR EDITOR

Charles Saufley

A: Neil Young's Crazy Horse rig. The controller at his feet is really a nerve center for a sprawling, archaic, electro-mechanical octopus: Sal Trentino's Whizzer remotely tweaking Neil's tweed Deluxe, a tube Maestro Echoplex, a Fender Reverb tank. And the actual *pedals* in the mix are mostly pretty weird ones like the Mu-Tron Octave Divider. I've been on the audience side of the resulting tidal wave several times. I'd give a lot to bathe in the sound from Neil's spot on the stage.

CURRENT OBSESSION:
Informing my guitar playing with as much non-guitar influence—visual, atmospheric, sonic, emotional, and environmental—as possible.

Middle left: Photo by Bill Steber

For a chance to be featured as our Reader of the Month, follow and tag us on Instagram @premierguitar.

Pedal Alley 2019:

GROUND CONTROL TO MAJOR TOM

Whether it's collections of old-school straightforward stomps or elaborate circuits for spacey experimentation, each year we're blown away by the different pedalboard setups our readers come up with. Hop aboard the tonal ship and be inspired!

It's that time of year, when *Premier Guitar* readers wow us with the intricate details of their pedalboards. A few highlights for 2019 include a surf board station, a bright board with LED lighting, and a pedal setup with no frills ... and literally no board at all. (All this player needs is beer and broken glass.) As a special treat, a pro pedal builder shares his demo board and tells us why and how he started building pedals from scratch—but you'll have to visit our website to see that one. Now go on, read on, stomp on!

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DAN STINSON: MAPLE STAPLE

This board was designed to house all my pedals for my home jam space in Canada. A carpenter friend put together the pure maple board and I soldered all the cables including an output harness. It has primarily been used for lead tones on my Orange amp and sounds killer!

The Chain: MXR EVH Phase 90, ISP Decimator G-String noise reduction, Electro-Harmonix POG2, Orange FS-1, Mojo Hand FX BMP-1 fuzz, Xotic SP Compressor, ZVEX Sonar tremolo, Sonic Research Turbo Tuner ST-200, Strymon TimeLine, Eventide Space, Pigtronix/Mission Dual Expression Pedal, and Dunlop Dimebag Cry Baby Wah.

EDDIE GARCIA: GREASY GUITAR

This is my board, from Denver, Colorado. You know it's been a great gig when your pedals are soaked in beer and surrounded by broken glass. Greasy old blues! My pedals include: an EarthQuaker Hummingbird tremolo, EarthQuaker Dispatch Master delay/reverb, Keeley Compressor, EarthQuaker Acapulco Gold overdrive, and an Electro-Harmonix Wailer Wah.

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DAVE HARRIS: SURF'S UP

I would like to show my "surf board." I've been playing on this for many years and making many waves with my band the Voltones. This comes with a "high surf advisory," from left to right:

- Boss TU-3 Chromatic Tuner: A must have, and the buffer is a factor in the tone.
- Vintage "3080 chip" MXR Dyna Comp: Stays on all the time.
- Joe Bonamassa Cry Baby: The buffer is nice, but skipping the true bypass option to degrade the treble a bit.
- B.K. Butler Tube Driver: I've owned several; this one's the best so far.
- 1980s Ibanez TS9: JRC4558D chip, brown mod. Waterproof? Maybe.
- Carl Martin Surf Trem: A very nice unit, using photo cells.
- T-Rex Replica delay/echo: Direct to a Marshall, with the dry side into the Fulltone Deja'Vibe.
- Fulltone Deja'Vibe MDV-1: Out to a second Marshall.

KURT MICHAEL: TRAILER TRASH

This is my custom-built Trailer Trash board. Anyone can get good tone out of this rig! It features a JAM Chill tremolo, Spaceman Sputnik fuzz, Analogman King of Tone overdrive, JHS Honey Comb tremolo, JHS Emperor V2 chorus, JHS Unicorn V3, Teese Wah, TC Electronic PolyTune, Mad Professor Tiny Orange Phaser (handwired), Strymon Flint tremolo, and a Strymon Brigadier delay. I play a 1962 Les Paul Standard Ebony Block through a Jeff Beck-toured "Becktone" Magnatone Super Fifty-Nine MK II.

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THE COMPARISON
US VS THEM

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US	THEM
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ERIK HOLKE

When my pedalboard got stolen a year ago, I had to build a new one. I use this one with my Sovtek MIG-50 (modded by Swedish amp-modder Tommy Folkesson, to have two channels) in my band Java Junkies and in church with a worship team here in Gothenburg, Sweden.

I built it using a Gator Pedal Tote board with power and a great carrying bag. The signal flow is: Vox wah, Korg Pitchback mini tuner, Amptweaker PressuRizer compressor, Rev Fat Drive, DOD Gunslinger Mosfet Distortion, Boss TR-2 Tremolo, Dunlop Jimi Hendrix Uni-Vibe, and Electro-Harmonix Canyon Delay. The box down to the left is a combined amp channel switcher and tap-tempo for the Canyon Delay.

I don't use the wah much, but will miss it if it's not there. The tuner is small, with a great big display. Quite conveniently, I won the compressor in the 2016 *Premier Guitar* Stompboxtober giveaway. It's more advanced than I need, but I'm learning to use it over time, as I really like compression (on everything). I love building things, so I built the Rev Fat Drive as a clone of Lovepedal's Eternity Overdrive, and I use it a lot. Sometimes I need a distortion, and the DOD is a good versatile choice. I love the Uni-Vibe and can't live without it, although I don't use it a lot, as it's a unique sound. The Canyon is my first tap-tempo delay and it's revolutionized my delay use. I primarily use the tape-delay sound, but sometimes change to get variation. Rock on!

ERIK ALLEN: THE BRAIN

The brain of my board is a Musicom Lab EFX MK-V switcher. What can I tell you? This gives me everything from Eric Johnson's pristine cleans to sustain-y leads without blinking an eye. Right now, I'm just using the preset mode on the Musicom Lab. After years, I'm done with the tap dance. Want my shoes?

Signal chain: Dunlop MC404 CAE Wah, Peterson tuner, Keely Compressor, Ernie Ball volume pedal (active), JAM RetroVibe, Friedman BE-OD, Xotic AC Plus boost/preamp (using the red side only), Free the Tone Red Jasper overdrive, ZVEX Box of Rock distortion (I use the boost only.), Strymon El Capistan dTape Echo (for analog delays), Free the Tone FT-2Y (digital delay), TC Electronic Hall of Fame Reverb, TC Electronic Ditto Looper.

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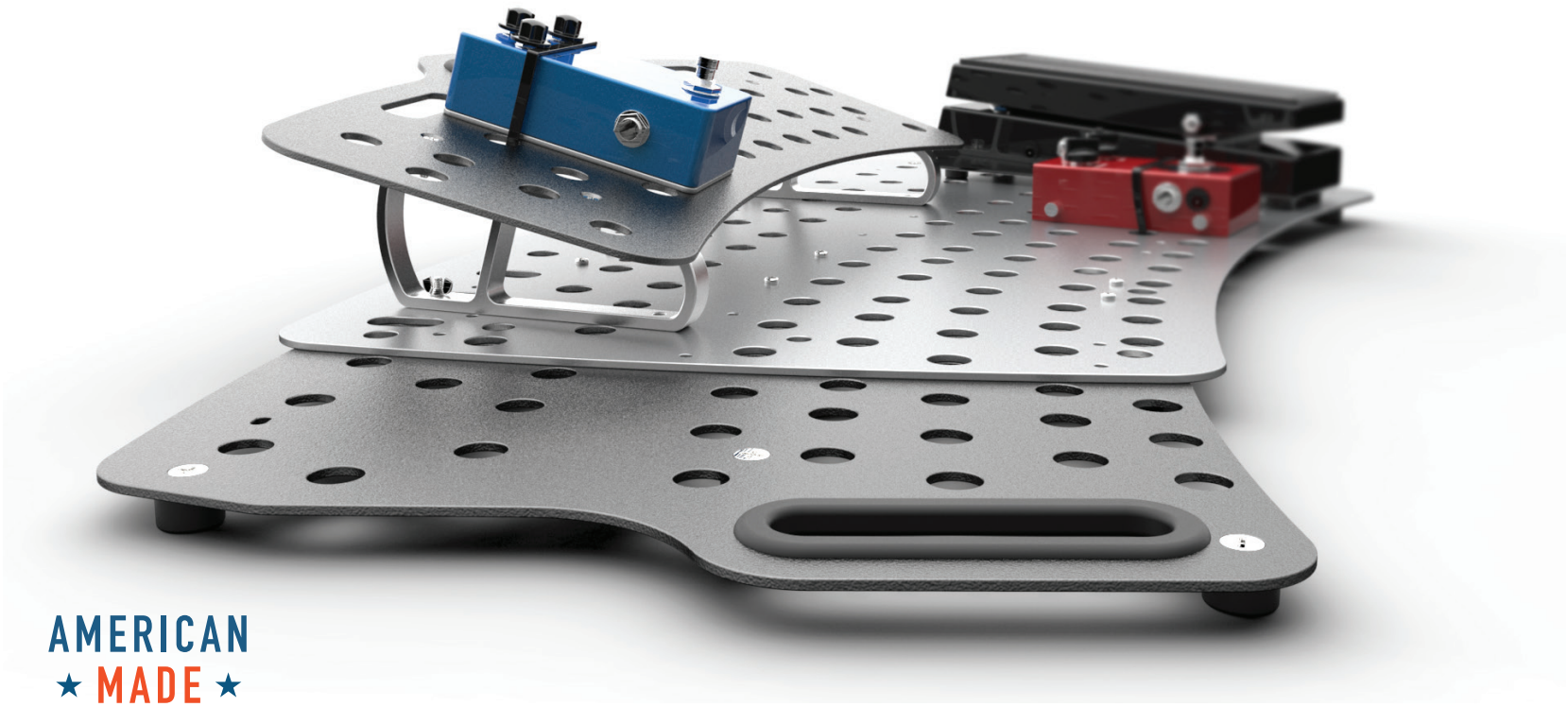

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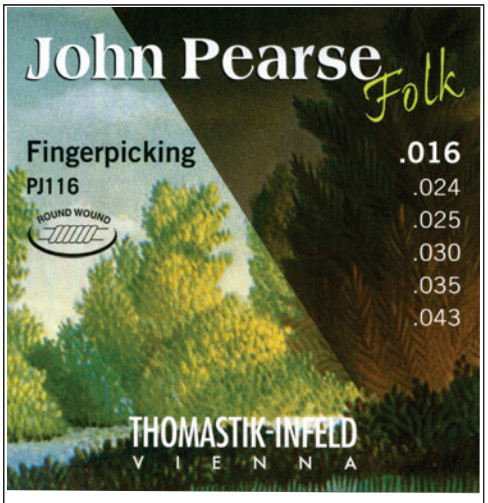

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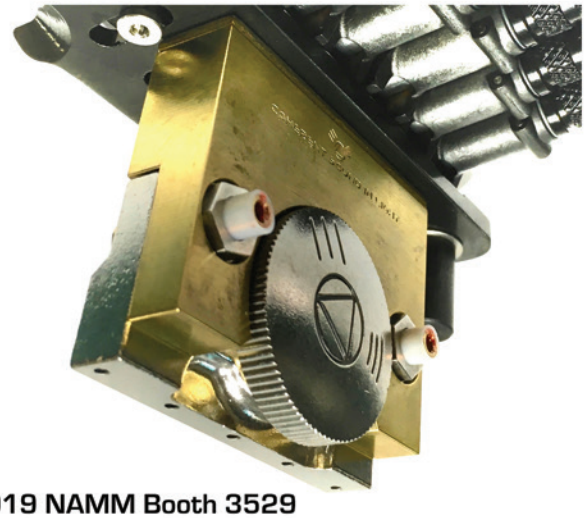

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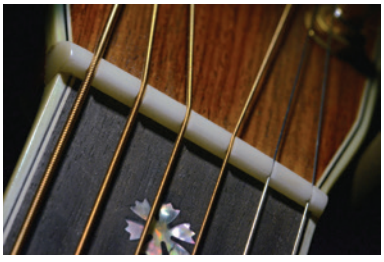
String Theory

BY JOL DANTZIG

JOL DANTZIG *is a noted designer, builder, and player who co-founded Hamer Guitars, one of the first boutique guitar brands, in 1973. Today, as the director of Dantzig Guitar Design, he continues to help define the art of custom guitar. To learn more, visit guitardesigner.com.*



This Martin utilizes edge-equal string spacing, which increases the distance between string centers towards the lower strings.

Why do we bond with certain instruments? Sometimes coming to terms with a guitar can be a protracted courtship, yet we feel that the struggle is worth the wait. Those guitars might have exceptional tone, or look great in the mirror (admit that you look in the mirror), or are used by a guitarist whose sound you admire. Still, it can feel like work.

There are other times you pick up a guitar that is so comfortable to play that you bond with it immediately. It might be a color you don't like or a brand you don't identify with, but this new best friend feels like forever from the first note. It's not a matter of tone or cosmetics, but rather the way it feels. You just play better. So, what makes a guitar a great-playing instrument?

From a technical standpoint, many instruments have almost interchangeable specifications, yet they behave totally differently. Some aficionados point to tonewoods or weight, but that's not the whole picture. It often comes to setup, but not just string action. While the action certainly plays an important part, it's a combination of factors. Some are easily manipulated, but others are overlooked because they are a bigger challenge to get right.

Close to the edge. One of the most important aspects of setup is string spacing, and it's actually more complicated than you might think. Although the total width of the fretboard determines the outer limits of string spacing, there's flexibility close to the edge. Depending on your fingering technique, you may require more or less space between the outside strings and the end of the frets. Some players are hampered by a short runoff area and find the 1st or 6th strings slipping off the end when playing certain chords. In that case, you'll feel more comfortable when the setup positions the outside strings inward a bit more than usual. This, of course, squeezes the distance between all of the strings, which can make the playing a little cramped. Wider fretboards accommodate this type of setup better than narrow ones, which is why some guitarists feel at home on instruments with a nut width of 1 11/16" or more.

For more typical-width fretboards, you can choose which outside string gets some extra space. If you find that the 6th string is falling off the fret on certain chords or riffs, you can re-cut a new nut to favor the low string by moving it inward a little bit. If you are unsure how much change you need, try this: Reach your right hand over your fretting hand, move the 1st or 6th string inward slightly with your right thumb, and hammer with your left to see if that fixes the problem. Chances are it won't take much to see if it improves the situation.

Sensitivity training. Your fretting fingers are very sensitive devices, so even a few thousandths of an inch change in location can make a difference you can feel. This ability for our fingers to detect minute changes brings up a whole world of small adjustments that can make or break the feel of your guitar. Probably the biggest factor is how the string spacing is divided up at both the nut and the bridge.

There are three schools of thought when it comes to arranging strings: center-equal, edge-equal, or progressive. Center-equal is the most obvious, and it involves spacing the six strings equally by using the centerline of each string as the measurement. There are gauges for this sold by guitar-parts vendors online, because it's the easiest and most widely used technique.

The second type is called string edge-equal because it assumes your fingers actually feel the space between the strings, as opposed to the center of the strings. In this spacing, it is the distance between the outside edges of the strings that are made equal. Because strings are different thicknesses, this method results in the center of each lower string to be further away than the one before. The downside is that different gauge sets will need different spacing, which makes it a difficult task to change sets, but it's a small price to pay if this spacing suits your style.

The third way to place the strings is just as the name suggests, a progressively larger gap between strings in the opposite direction from the edge-equal technique. This places the high strings successively further apart than the low ones. I suppose the thinking here is that more bending and complex fingering occurs on the higher strings. I'm not sure if I buy this, but there are players and builders who swear by it.

Each time you play an instrument, make note of which method was used and how you like the feel. After a while, you'll know if you prefer one more than the others. It might be a way to resurrect an instrument you didn't jell with at first, meaning the honeymoon can begin anew.

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Wearing Out Things That Nobody Wears

BY JOHN BOHLINGER

JOHN BOHLINGER *is a Nashville-based multi-instrumentalist who, when not appearing in* PG *Rig Rundown and Review Demo videos, is best known for leading the band on NBC's* Nashville Star *and serving as music director for the* CMT Music Awards *and specials on PBS and GAC. He is also music director for USA Network's* Real Country *program.*

Kings of bling: Our columnist and the late Porter Wagoner, who pioneered spangly Western-themed stage wear designed by the famed tailor Nudie Cohn, who originated the look in 1947.

Given that our demographic is comprised entirely of musicians, I'll speak bluntly. We are the nerd herd. At times, we may pass for normal, but we know in our heart of hearts that we are weirdos. Beginning around seventh grade, our abnormalities may have led to rejection by our classmates. But with time and contemplation, we've learned that our weirdness is our golden unicorn superpower—and that many of the straights love us for our eccentricities, rather than in spite of them.

I bring this up, because I've seen some disheartening normalcy with the way performers look of late. Being a musician gives us license to let our freak flag fly. Like our beloved patron saint Steven Tyler said, we should be "wearing out things that nobody wears." So why is it that the majority of modern performers gave up stage clothes?

We can give 21st century Eric Clapton a pass, because he's a grandfather in his 70s who has earned the right to place comfort over style. But back in the day, E.C. rocked a perm-fro, a Mongolian warrior jacket, corduroy bell-bottoms, and a pirate blouse. Had Slowhand been wearing his now-ubiquitous golf shirt and khakis in '67, nobody would have confused him with God.

An audience does not go to a show to see a version of themselves. They want to see something spectacular. I realize I'm going to sound like the old guy saying "kids these days," but the give-a-shit is gone. There are people onstage checking their phones between songs, dressed like they are playing video games at a frat house or stumbling through the aisles of Walmart.

I'm not saying that every performer should wear a checkered leotard, like Freddie Mercury, but they need a look. The Chris Robinson Brotherhood and Tyler Bryant & the Shakedown may be wearing dirty jeans and T-shirts, but they both have a definite look on and off stage that separates them from civilians. You look at those guys and think, "They are rock stars."

Back when I moved to Nashville, during the Dwight Yoakam reign, every artist that got a record deal immediately went to Manuel Couture, which was then in a huge brick Victorian mansion near Music Row, and laid down $5,000 on a hillbilly jacket. Manuel's new shop is a humble clapboard house in the Berry Hill district of Nashville. The man who dressed Elvis, Gram Parsons, John Lennon, Keith Richards and every other cool music star has had to cut back—in an age where artists wear baseball caps and T-shirts to awards shows.

Most days, I dress like an adultolesent: a swag T-shirt given to me by some bar or manufacturer, and whatever jeans were lying on my floor when I got up. But there are four solid feet of my closet full of somewhat outlandish clothes that would look ridiculous anywhere but onstage. They include a pair of skin-tight, German-made leather pants formerly owned by Gene Simmons, a cowboy suit with piping formerly owned by Ranger Doug from Riders in the Sky, a tight denim Western shirt once owned by Tim McGraw, and two vintage Nudie cowboy shirts. In addition to this fine garb, I have a legit mariachi suit I had made 20 years ago in Manzanillo, Mexico, by a tailor working a leg-pump sewing machine in a dirt floor, cinderblock shop. The suit took a week to make and cost $2,034 pesos, roughly $215 in U.S. dollars. (I later submitted the receipt to my accountant, who luckily confused pesos with dollars, giving a far better write-off than I was due. As I type this, I hope this is beyond the statute of limitations for tax fraud. The IRS does not play.)

I also have a hillbilly jacket that my former wife, Sherrie, and I made from a thrift store white tux. We dyed it gray, cut off the tails to convert it to a Bolero jacket, and sewed some fancy beads on the shoulders. Total cost? Around $25.

As it turns out, these clothes have been some of the best investments I ever made. I've worn these outfits on literally thousands of gigs. Whenever I put them on, I know that even if I sound like tennis shoes in a dryer, I'm going to at least look like they hired the right person.

There's something to be said for getting in character for a performance. All young musicians should be forced to watch Prince, Angus, Marty Stuart, Kiss, Nuno, ZZ Top, and Lenny Kravitz before they book their first gig. Playing notes is not performing. And if you don't care enough to try to look right, you may not care enough to get into what you are playing.

Decades ago, I read an interview with Chet Atkins where they asked the CGP if he had any advice for young guitarists. Chet said, "Hold onto your ties. They come back in style quicker than you'd think." Take it from the master.

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